English Men of Letters

EDITED BY JOHN MORLEY

# SCOTT

R. H. HUTTON

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English Men of Letters

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# SIR WALTER SCOTT

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# SIR WALTER SCOTT

BY

RICHARD H. HUTTON

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# PREFATORY NOTE.

It will be observed that the greater part of this little book has been taken in one form or other from Lockhart's *Life of Sir Walter Scott*, in ten volumes. No introduction to Scott would be worth much in which that course was not followed. Indeed, excepting Sir Walter's own writings, there is hardly any other great source of information about him; and that is so full, that hardly anything needful to illustrate the subject of Scott's life remains untouched. As regards the only matters of controversy,—Scott's relations to the Ballantynes, I have taken care to check Mr. Lockhart's statements by reading those of the representatives of the Ballantyne brothers; but with this exception, Sir Walter's own works and Lockhart's life of him are the great authorities concerning his character and his story.

Just ten years ago Mr. Gladstone, in expressing to the late Mr. Hope Scott the great delight which the perusal of Lockhart's life of Sir Walter had given him, wrote, "I may be wrong, but I am vaguely under the impression that it has never had a really wide circulation. If so, it is the saddest pity, and I should greatly like (without any censure on its present length) to see published an abbreviation of it." Mr. Gladstone did not then know that as long ago as 1848 Mr. Lockhart did

himself prepare such an abbreviation, in which the original eighty-four chapters were compressed into eighteen, —though the abbreviation contained additions as well as compressions. But even this abridgment is itself a bulky volume of 800 pages, containing, I should think, considerably more than a third of the reading in the original ten volumes, and is not, therefore, very likely to be preferred to the completer work. In some respects I hope that this introduction may supply, better than that bulky abbreviation, what Mr. Gladstone probably meant to suggest,—some slight miniature taken from the great picture with care enough to tempt on those who look on it to the study of the fuller life, as well as of that image of Sir Walter which is impressed by his own hand upon his works.

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# SIR WALTER SCOTT.

## CHAPTER I.

### ANCESTRY, PARENTAGE, AND CHILDHOOD.

Sir Walter Scott was the first literary man of a great riding, sporting, and fighting clan. Indeed, his father—a Writer to the Signet, or Edinburgh solicitor—was the first of his race to adopt a town life and a sedentary profession. Sir Walter was the lineal descendant—six generations removed—of that Walter Scott commemorated in *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, who is known in Border history and legend as Auld Wat of Harden. Auld Wat's son William, captured by Sir Gideon Murray, of Elibank, during a raid of the Scotts on Sir Gideon's lands, was, as tradition says, given his choice between being hanged on Sir Gideon's private gallows, and marrying the ugliest of Sir Gideon's three ugly daughters, Meikle-mouthed Meg, reputed as carrying off the prize of ugliness among the women of four counties. Sir William was a handsome man. He took three days to consider the alternative proposed to him, but chose life with the large-mouthed lady in the end; and found her, according to the tradition which the poet, her descendant, has transmitted, an excel-

lent wife, with a fine talent for pickling the beef which her husband stole from the herds of his foes. Meikle-mouthed Meg transmitted a distinct trace of her large mouth to all her descendants, and not least to him who was to use his "meikle" mouth to best advantage as the spokesman of his race. Rather more than half-way between Auld Wat of Harden's times—i. e., the middle of the sixteenth century—and those of Sir Walter Scott, poet and novelist, lived Sir Walter's great-grandfather, Walter Scott generally known in Teviotdale by the surname of Beardie, because he would never cut his beard after the banishment of the Stuarts, and who took arms in their cause and lost by his intrigues on their behalf almost all that he had, besides running the greatest risk of being hanged as a traitor. This was the ancestor of whom Sir Walter speaks in the introduction to the last canto of *Marmion*:—

"And thus my Christmas still I hold,
Where my great grandsire came of old,
With amber beard and flaxen hair,
And reverend apostolic air,—
The feast and holy tide to share,
And mix sobriety with wine,
And honest mirth with thoughts divine;
Small thought was his in after time
E'er to be hitch'd into a rhyme,
The simple sire could only boast
That he was loyal to his cost;
The banish'd race of kings revered,
And lost his land—but kept his beard."

Sir Walter inherited from Beardie that sentimental Stuart bias which his better judgment condemned, but which seemed to be rather part of his blood than of his mind. And most useful to him this sentiment un-

doubtedly was in helping him to restore the mould and fashion of the past. Beardie's second son was Sir Walter's grandfather, and to him he owed not only his first childish experience of the delights of country life, but also,—in his own estimation at least,—that risky, speculative, and sanguine spirit which had so much influence over his fortunes. The good man of Sandy-Knowe, wishing to breed sheep, and being destitute of capital, borrowed 30*l.* from a shepherd who was willing to invest that sum for him in sheep; and the two set off to purchase a flock near Wooler, in Northumberland; but when the shepherd had found what he thought would suit their purpose, he returned to find his master galloping about a fine hunter, on which he had spent the whole capital in hand. *This* speculation, however, prospered. A few days later Robert Scott displayed the qualities of the hunter to such admirable effect with John Scott of Harden's hounds, that he sold the horse for double the money he had given, and, unlike his grandson, abandoned speculative purchases there and then. In the latter days of his clouded fortunes, after Ballantyne's and Constable's failure, Sir Walter was accustomed to point to the picture of his grandfather and say, "Blood will out: my building and planting was but his buying the hunter before he stocked his sheep-walk, over again." But Sir Walter added, says Mr. Lockhart, as he glanced at the likeness of his own staid and prudent father, "Yet it was a wonder, too, for I have a thread of the attorney in me," which was doubtless the case; nor was that thread the least of his inheritances, for from his father certainly Sir Walter derived that disposition towards conscientious, plodding industry, legalism of mind, methodical habits of work, and a

generous, equitable interpretation of the scope of all his obligations to others, which, prized and cultivated by him as they were, turned a great genius, which, especially considering the hare-brained element in him, might easily have been frittered away or devoted to worthless ends, to such fruitful account, and stamped it with so grand an impress of personal magnanimity and fortitude. Sir Walter's father reminds one in not a few of the formal and rather martinetish traits which are related of him, of the father of Goethe, "a formal man, with strong ideas of strait-laced education, passionately orderly (he thought a good book nothing without a good binding), and never so much excited as by a necessary deviation from the 'pre-established harmony' of household rules." That description would apply almost wholly to the sketch of old Mr. Scott which the novelist has given us under the thin disguise of Alexander Fairford, Writer to the Signet, in *Redgauntlet*, a figure confessedly meant, in its chief features, to represent his father. To this Sir Walter adds, in one of his later journals, the trait that his father was a man of fine presence, who conducted all conventional arrangements with a certain grandeur and dignity of air, and "absolutely loved a funeral." "He seemed to preserve the list of a whole bead-roll of cousins merely for the pleasure of being at their funerals, which he was often asked to superintend, and I suspect had sometimes to pay for. He carried me with him as often as he could to these mortuary ceremonies; but feeling I was not, like him, either useful or ornamental, I escaped as often as I could." This strong dash of the conventional in Scott's father, this satisfaction in seeing people fairly to the door of life, and taking his final leave of them there, with something of a ceremonious flourish

of observance, was, however, combined with a much nobler and deeper kind of orderliness. Sir Walter used to say that his father had lost no small part of a very flourishing business, by insisting that his clients should do their duty to their own people better than they were themselves at all inclined to do it. And of this generous strictness in sacrificing his own interests to his sympathy for others, the son had as much as the father.

Sir Walter's mother, who was a Miss Rutherford, the daughter of a physician, had been better educated than most Scotchwomen of her day, in spite of having been sent "to be finished off" by "the honourable Mrs. Ogilvie," whose training was so effective, in one direction at least, that even in her eightieth year Mrs. Scott could not enjoy a comfortable rest in her chair, but "took as much care to avoid touching her chair with her back, as if she had still been under the stern eyes of Mrs. Ogilvie." None the less Mrs. Scott was a motherly, comfortable woman, with much tenderness of heart, and a well-stored, vivid memory. Sir Walter, writing of her, after his mother's death, to Lady Louisa Stewart, says, "She had a mind peculiarly well stored with much acquired information and natural talent, and as she was very old, and had an excellent memory, she could draw, without the least exaggeration or affectation, the most striking pictures of the past age. If I have been able to do anything in the way of painting the past times, it is very much from the studies with which she presented me. She connected a long period of time with the present generation, for she remembered, and had often spoken with, a person who perfectly recollected the battle of Dunbar and Oliver Cromwell's subsequent entry into Edinburgh." On the day before the stroke of paralysis which carried her off, she

had told Mr. and Mrs. Scott of Harden, "with great accuracy, the real story of the Bride of Lammermuir, and pointed out wherein it differed from the novel. She had all the names of the parties, and pointed out (for she was a great genealogist) their connexion with existing families." [1] Sir Walter records many evidences of the tenderness of his mother's nature, and he returned warmly her affection for himself. His executors, in lifting up his desk, the evening after his burial, found "arranged in careful order a series of little objects, which had obviously been so placed there that his eye might rest on them every morning before he began his tasks. These were the old-fashioned boxes that had garnished his mother's toilette, when he, a sickly child, slept in her dressing-room,—the silver taper-stand, which the young advocate had bought for her with his first five-guinea fee, —a row of small packets inscribed with her hand, and containing the hair of those of her offspring that had died before her,—his father's snuff-box, and etui-case,—and more things of the like sort." [2] A story, characteristic of both Sir Walter's parents, is told by Mr. Lockhart which will serve better than anything I can remember to bring the father and mother of Scott vividly before the imagination. His father, like Mr. Alexander Fairford, in *Redgauntlet*, though himself a strong Hanoverian, inherited enough feeling for the Stuarts from his grandfather Beardie, and sympathized enough with those who were, as he neutrally expressed it, "out in '45," to ignore as much as possible any phrases offensive to the Jacobites. For instance, he always called Charles Edward not *the Pre-*

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, vi. 172-3. The edition referred to is throughout the edition of 1839 in ten volumes.

[2] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, x. 241.

*tender* but *the Chevalier*,—and he did business for many Jacobites :—

"Mrs. Scott's curiosity was strongly excited one autumn by the regular appearance at a certain hour every evening of a sedan chair, to deposit a person carefully muffled up in a mantle, who was immediately ushered into her husband's private room, and commonly remained with him there until long after the usual bed-time of this orderly family. Mr. Scott answered her repeated inquiries with a vagueness that irritated the lady's feelings more and more; until at last she could bear the thing no longer; but one evening, just as she heard the bell ring as for the stranger's chair to carry him off, she made her appearance within the forbidden parlour with a salver in her hand, observing that she thought the gentlemen had sat so long they would be better of a dish of tea, and had ventured accordingly to bring some for their acceptance. The stranger, a person of distinguished appearance, and richly dressed, bowed to the lady and accepted a cup; but her husband knit his brows, and refused very coldly to partake the refreshment. A moment afterwards the visitor withdrew, and Mr. Scott, lifting up the window-sash, took the cup, which he had left empty on the table, and tossed it out upon the pavement. The lady exclaimed for her china, but was put to silence by her husband's saying, "I can forgive your little curiosity, madam, but you must pay the penalty. I may admit into my house, on a piece of business, persons wholly unworthy to be treated as guests by my wife. Neither lip of me nor of mine comes after Mr. Murray of Broughton's.'

"This was the unhappy man who, after attending Prince Charles Stuart as his secretary throughout the greater part of his expedition, condescended to redeem his own life and fortune by bearing evidence against the noblest of his late master's adherents, when—

> "Pitied by gentle hearts, Kilmarnock died,
> The brave, Balmerino were on thy side." [1]

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, i. 243-4.

"Broughton's saucer"—i. e. the saucer belonging to the cup thus sacrificed by Mr. Scott to his indignation against one who had redeemed his own life and fortune by turning king's evidence against one of Prince Charles Stuart's adherents,—was carefully preserved by his son, and hung up in his first study, or "den," under a little print of Prince Charlie. This anecdote brings before the mind very vividly the character of Sir Walter's parents. The eager curiosity of the active-minded woman, whom "the honourable Mrs. Ogilvie" had been able to keep upright in her chair for life, but not to cure of the desire to unravel the little mysteries of which she had a passing glimpse; the grave formality of the husband, fretting under his wife's personal attention to a dishonoured man, and making her pay the penalty by dashing to pieces the cup which the king's evidence had used,—again, the visitor himself, perfectly conscious no doubt that the Hanoverian lawyer held him in utter scorn for his faithlessness and cowardice, and reluctant, nevertheless, to reject the courtesy of the wife, though he could not get anything but cold legal advice from the husband:—all these are figures which must have acted on the youthful imagination of the poet with singular vivacity, and shaped themselves in a hundred changing turns of the historical kaleidoscope which was always before his mind's eye, as he mused upon that past which he was to restore for us with almost more than its original freshness of life. With such scenes touching even his own home, Scott must have been constantly taught to balance in his own mind, the more romantic, against the more sober and rational considerations, which had so recently divided house against house, even in the same family and clan. That the stern Calvinistic lawyer should have retained so much of

his grandfather Beardie's respect for the adherents of the exiled house of Stuart, must in itself have struck the boy as even more remarkable than the passionate loyalty of the Stuarts' professed partisans, and have lent a new sanction to the romantic drift of his mother's old traditions, and one to which they must have been indebted for a great part of their fascination.

Walter Scott, the ninth of twelve children, of whom the first six died in early childhood, was born in Edinburgh, on the 15th of August, 1771. Of the six later-born children, all but one were boys, and the one sister was a somewhat querulous invalid, whom he seems to have pitied almost more than he loved. At the age of eighteen months the boy had a teething-fever, ending in a life-long lameness; and this was the reason why the child was sent to reside with his grandfather—the speculative grandfather, who had doubled his capital by buying a racehorse instead of sheep—at Sandy-Knowe, near the ruined tower of Smailholm, celebrated afterwards in his ballad of *The Eve of St. John*, in the neighbourhood of some fine crags. To these crags the housemaid sent from Edinburgh to look after him, used to carry him up, with a design (which she confessed to the housekeeper)—due, of course, to incipient insanity—of murdering the child there, and burying him in the moss. Of course the maid was dismissed. After this the child used to be sent out, when the weather was fine, in the safer charge of the shepherd, who would often lay him beside the sheep. Long afterwards Scott told Mr. Skene, during an excursion with Turner, the great painter, who was drawing his illustration of Smailholm tower for one of Scott's works, that "the habit of lying on the turf there among the sheep and the lambs had given his mind a peculiar tenderness for

these animals, which it had ever since retained." Being forgotten one day upon the knolls when a thunderstorm came on, his aunt ran out to bring him in, and found him shouting, "Bonny! bonny!" at every flash of lightning. One of the old servants at Sandy-Knowe spoke of the child long afterwards as "a sweet-tempered bairn, a darling with all about the house," and certainly the miniature taken of him in his seventh year confirms the impression thus given. It is sweet-tempered above everything, and only the long upper lip and large mouth, derived from his ancestress, Meg Murray, convey the promise of the power which was in him. Of course the high, almost conical forehead, which gained him in his later days from his comrades at the bar the name of "Old Peveril," in allusion to "the peak" which they saw towering high above the heads of other men as he approached, is not so much marked beneath the childish locks of this miniature as it was in later life; and the massive, and, in repose, certainly heavy face of his maturity, which conveyed the impression of the great bulk of his character, is still quite invisible under the sunny ripple of childish earnestness and gaiety. Scott's hair in childhood was light chestnut, which turned to nut brown in youth. His eyebrows were bushy, for we find mention made of them as a "pent-house." His eyes were always light blue. They had in them a capacity, on the one hand, for enthusiasm, sunny brightness, and even hare-brained humour, and on the other for expressing determined resolve and kindly irony, which gave great range of expression to the face. There are plenty of materials for judging what sort of a boy Scott was. In spite of his lameness, he early taught himself to clamber about with an agility that few children could have surpassed, and to sit his first pony—a

little Shetland, not bigger than a large Newfoundland dog, which used to come into the house to be fed by him—even in gallops on very rough ground. He became very early a declaimer. Having learned the ballad of Hardy Knute, he shouted it forth with such pertinacious enthusiasm that the clergyman of his grandfather's parish complained that he "might as well speak in a cannon's mouth as where that child was." At six years of age Mrs. Cockburn described him as the most astounding genius of a boy, she ever saw. "He was reading a poem to his mother when I went in. I made him read on: it was the description of a shipwreck. His passion rose with the storm. 'There's the mast gone,' says he; 'crash it goes; they will all perish.' After his agitation he turns to me, 'That is too melancholy,' says he; 'I had better read you something more amusing.'" And after the call, he told his aunt he liked Mrs. Cockburn, for "she was a *virtuoso* like himself." "Dear Walter," says Aunt Jenny, "what is a *virtuoso?*" "Don't ye know? Why, it's one who wishes and will know everything." This last scene took place in his father's house in Edinburgh; but Scott's life at Sandy-Knowe, including even the old minister, Dr. Duncan, who so bitterly complained of the boy's ballad-spouting, is painted for us, as everybody knows, in the picture of his infancy given in the introduction to the third canto of *Marmion*:—

"It was a barren scene and wild,
Where naked cliffs were rudely piled:
But ever and anon between
Lay velvet tufts of loveliest green;
And well the lonely infant knew
Recesses where the wall-flower grew,
And honeysuckle loved to crawl
Up the low crag and ruin'd wall.

I deem'd such nooks the sweetest shade
The sun in all its round survey'd;
And still I thought that shatter'd tower
The mightiest work of human power;
And marvell'd as the aged hind
With some strange tale bewitch'd my mind,
Of forayers, who, with headlong force,
Down from that strength had spurr'd their horse,
Their southern rapine to renew,
Far in the distant Cheviots blue,
And, home returning, fill'd the hall
With revel, wassail-rout, and brawl.
Methought that still with trump and clang
The gateway's broken arches rang;
Methought grim features, seam'd with scars,
Glared through the window's rusty bars;
And ever, by the winter hearth,
Old tales I heard of woe or mirth,
Of lovers' slights, of ladies' charms,
Of witches' spells, of warriors' arms,
Of patriot battles, won of old
By Wallace wight and Bruce the bold;
Of later fields of feud and fight,
When, pouring from their Highland height,
The Scottish clans, in headlong sway,
Had swept the scarlet ranks away.
While, stretch'd at length upon the floor,
Again I fought each combat o'er,
Pebbles and shells in order laid,
The mimic ranks of war display'd;
And onward still the Scottish lion bore,
And still the scatter'd Southron fled before.
Still, with vain fondness, could I trace
Anew each kind familiar face
That brighten'd at our evening fire!
From the thatch'd mansion's grey-hair'd sire,
Wise without learning, plain and good,
And sprung of Scotland's gentler blood;
Whose eye in age, quick, clear, and keen,
Show'd what in youth its glance had been;
Whose doom discording neighbours sought,
Content with equity unbought;

To him the venerable priest,
Our frequent and familiar guest,
Whose life and manners well could paint
Alike the student and the saint;
Alas! whose speech too oft I broke
With gambol rude and timeless joke;
For I was wayward, bold, and wild,
A self-will'd imp, a grandame's child;
But, half a plague and half a jest,
Was still endured, beloved, caress'd."

A picture this of a child of great spirit, though with that spirit was combined an active and subduing sweetness which could often conquer, as by a sudden spell, those whom the boy loved. Towards those, however, whom he did not love he could be vindictive. His relative, the laird of Raeburn, on one occasion wrung the neck of a pet starling, which the child had partly tamed. "I flew at his throat like a wild-cat," he said, in recalling the circumstance, fifty years later, in his journal on occasion of the old laird's death; "and was torn from him with no little difficulty." And, judging from this journal, I doubt whether he had ever really forgiven the laird of Raeburn. Towards those whom he loved but had offended, his manner was very different. "I seldom," said one of his tutors, Mr. Mitchell, "had occasion all the time I was in the family to find fault with him, even for trifles, and only once to threaten serious castigation, of which he was no sooner aware, than he suddenly sprang up, threw his arms about my neck and kissed me." And the quaint old gentleman adds this commentary:—"By such generous and noble conduct my displeasure was in a moment converted into esteem and admiration; my soul melted into tenderness, and I was ready to mingle my tears with his." This spontaneous and fascinating sweet-

ness of his childhood was naturally overshadowed to some extent in later life by Scott's masculine and proud character, but it was always in him. And there was much of true character in the child behind this sweetness. He had wonderful self-command, and a peremptory kind of good sense, even in his infancy. While yet a child under six years of age, hearing one of the servants beginning to tell a ghost-story to another, and well knowing that if he listened, it would scare away his night's rest, he acted for himself with all the promptness of an elder person acting for him, and, in spite of the fascination of the subject, resolutely muffled his head in the bed-clothes and refused to hear the tale. His sagacity in judging of the character of others was shown, too, even as a school-boy; and once it led him to take an advantage which caused him many compunctions in after-life, whenever he recalled his skilful puerile tactics. On one occasion—I tell the story as he himself rehearsed it to Samuel Rogers, almost at the end of his life, after his attack of apoplexy, and just before leaving England for Italy in the hopeless quest of health—he had long desired to get above a school-fellow in his class, who defied all his efforts, till Scott noticed that whenever a question was asked of his rival, the lad's fingers grasped a particular button on his waistcoat, while his mind went in search of the answer. Scott accordingly anticipated that if he could remove this button, the boy would be thrown out, and so it proved. The button was cut off, and the next time the lad was questioned, his fingers being unable to find the button, and his eyes going in perplexed search after his fingers, he stood confounded, and Scott mastered by strategy the place which he could not gain by mere industry. "Often in after-life," said

Scott, in narrating the manœuvre to Rogers, "has the sight of him smote me as I passed by him; and often have I resolved to make him some reparation, but it ended in good resolutions. Though I never renewed my acquaintance with him, I often saw him, for he filled some inferior office in one of the courts of law at Edinburgh. Poor fellow! I believe he is dead; he took early to drinking."[1]

Scott's school reputation was one of irregular ability; he "glanced like a meteor from one end of the class to the other," and received more praise for his interpretation of the spirit of his authors than for his knowledge of their language. Out of school his fame stood higher. He extemporized innumerable stories to which his schoolfellows delighted to listen; and, in spite of his lameness, he was always in the thick of the "bickers," or street fights with the boys of the town, and renowned for his boldness in climbing the "kittle nine stanes" which are "projected high in air from the precipitous black granite of the Castle-rock." At home he was much bullied by his elder brother Robert, a lively lad, not without some powers of verse-making, who went into the navy, then in an unlucky moment passed into the merchant service of the East India Company, and so lost the chance of distinguishing himself in the great naval campaigns of Nelson. Perhaps Scott would have been all the better for a sister a little closer to him than Anne—sickly and fanciful—appears ever to have been. The masculine side of life appears to predominate a little too much in his school and college days, and he had such vast energy, vitality, and pride, that his life at this time would have borne a little taming under the influence of a sister thoroughly

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, i. 128.

congenial to him. In relation to his studies he was wilful, though not perhaps perverse. He steadily declined, for instance, to learn Greek, though he mastered Latin pretty fairly. After a time spent at the High School, Edinburgh, Scott was sent to a school at Kelso, where his master made a friend and companion of him, and so poured into him a certain amount of Latin scholarship which he would never otherwise have obtained. I need hardly add that as a boy Scott was, so far as a boy could be, a Tory—a worshipper of the past, and a great Conservative of any remnant of the past which reformers wished to get rid of. In the autobiographical fragment of 1808, he says, in relation to these school-days, "I, with my head on fire for chivalry, was a Cavalier; my friend was a Roundhead; I was a Tory, and he was a Whig; I hated Presbyterians, and admired Montrose with his victorious Highlanders; he liked the Presbyterian Ulysses, the deep and politic Argyle; so that we never wanted subjects of dispute, but our disputes were always amicable." And he adds candidly enough: "In all these tenets there was no real conviction on my part, arising out of acquaintance with the views or principles of either party. . . . . I took up politics at that period, as King Charles II. did his religion, from an idea that the Cavalier creed was the more gentlemanlike persuasion of the two." And the uniformly amicable character of these controversies between the young people, itself shows how much more they were controversies of the imagination than of faith. I doubt whether Scott's *convictions* on the issues of the Past were ever very much more decided than they were during his boyhood; though undoubtedly he learned to understand much more profoundly what was really held by the ablest men on both

sides of these disputed issues. The result, however, was, I think, that while he entered better and better into both sides as life went on, he never adopted either with any earnestness of conviction, being content to admit, even to himself, that while his feelings leaned in one direction, his reason pointed decidedly in the other; and holding that it was hardly needful to identify himself positively with either. As regarded the present, however, feeling always carried the day. Scott was a Tory all his life.

## CHAPTER II.

### YOUTH—CHOICE OF A PROFESSION.

As Scott grew up, entered the classes of the college, and began his legal studies, first as apprentice to his father, and then in the law classes of the University, he became noticeable to all his friends for his gigantic memory,—the rich stores of romantic material with which it was loaded,—his giant feats of industry for any cherished purpose,—his delight in adventure and in all athletic enterprises,—his great enjoyment of youthful "rows," so long as they did not divide the knot of friends to which he belonged, and his skill in peacemaking amongst his own set. During his apprenticeship his only means of increasing his slender allowance with funds which he could devote to his favourite studies, was to earn money by copying, and he tells us himself that he remembered writing "120 folio pages with no interval either for food or rest," fourteen or fifteen hours' very hard work at the very least,—expressly for this purpose.

In the second year of Scott's apprenticeship, at about the age of sixteen, he had an attack of hæmorrhage, no recurrence of which took place for some forty years, but which was then the beginning of the end. During this illness silence was absolutely imposed upon him,—two old ladies putting their fingers on

their lips whenever he offered to speak. It was at this time that the lad began his study of the scenic side of history, and especially of campaigns, which he illustrated for himself by the arrangement of shells, seeds, and pebbles, so as to represent encountering armies, in the manner referred to (and referred to apparently in anticipation of a later stage of his life than that he was then speaking of) in the passage from the introduction to the third canto of *Marmion* which I have already given. He also managed so to arrange the looking-glasses in his room as to see the troops march out to exercise in the meadows, as he lay in bed. His reading was almost all in the direction of military exploit, or romance and mediæval legend and the later border songs of his own country. He learned Italian and read Ariosto. Later he learned Spanish and devoured Cervantes, whose "*novelas*," he said, "first inspired him with the ambition to excel in fiction;" and all that he read and admired he remembered. Scott used to illustrate the capricious affinity of his own memory for what suited it, and its complete rejection of what did not, by old Beattie of Meikledale's answer to a Scotch divine, who complimented him on the strength of his memory. "No, sir," said the old Borderer, "I have no command of my memory. It only retains what hits my fancy; and probably, sir, if you were to preach to me for two hours, I would not be able, when you finished, to remember a word you had been saying." Such a memory, when it belongs to a man of genius, is really a sieve of the most valuable kind. It sifts away what is foreign and alien to his genius, and assimilates what is suited to it. In his very last days, when he was visiting Italy for the first time, Scott delighted in Malta, for it recalled to him Vertot's *Knights of Malta*,

and much other mediæval story which he had pored over in his youth. But when his friends descanted to him at Pozzuoli on the Thermæ—commonly called the Temple of Serapis—among the ruins of which he stood, he only remarked that he would believe whatever he was told, "for many of his friends, and particularly Mr. Morritt, had frequently tried to drive classical antiquities, as they are called, into his head, but they had always found his skull too thick." Was it not perhaps some deep literary instinct, like that here indicated, which made him, as a lad, refuse so steadily to learn Greek, and try to prove to his indignant professor that Ariosto was superior to Homer? Scott afterwards deeply regretted this neglect of Greek; but I cannot help thinking that his regret was misplaced. Greek literature would have brought before his mind standards of poetry and art which could not but have both deeply impressed and greatly daunted an intellect of so much power; I say both impressed and daunted, because I believe that Scott himself would never have succeeded in studies of a classical kind, while he might—like Goethe perhaps—have been either misled, by admiration for that school, into attempting what was not adapted to his genius, or else disheartened in the work for which his character and ancestry really fitted him. It has been said that there is a real affinity between Scott and Homer. But the long and refluent music of Homer, once naturalized in his mind, would have discontented him with that quick, sharp, metrical tramp of his own moss-troopers, to which alone his genius as a poet was perfectly suited.

It might be supposed that with these romantic tastes, Scott could scarcely have made much of a lawyer, though the inference would, I believe, be quite mistaken. His

father, however, reproached him with being better fitted for a pedlar than a lawyer,—so persistently did he trudge over all the neighbouring counties in search of the beauties of nature and the historic associations of battle, siege, or legend. On one occasion when, with their last penny spent, Scott and one of his companions had returned to Edinburgh, living during their last day on drinks of milk offered by generous peasant-women, and the hips and haws on the hedges, he remarked to his father how much he had wished for George Primrose's power of playing on the flute in order to earn a meal by the way, old Mr. Scott, catching grumpily at the idea, replied, "I greatly doubt, sir, you were born for nae better then a gangrel scrape-gut,"—a speech which very probably suggested his son's conception of Darsie Latimer's adventures with the blind fiddler, "Wandering Willie," in *Redgauntlet*. And, it is true that these were the days of mental and moral fermentation, what was called in Germany the Sturm-und-Drang, the "fret-and-fury" period of Scott's life, so far as one so mellow and genial in temper ever passed through a period of fret and fury at all. In other words these were the days of rapid motion, of walks of thirty miles a day which the lame lad yet found no fatigue to him; of mad enterprises, scrapes and drinking-bouts, in one of which Scott was half persuaded by his friends that he actually sang a song for the only time in his life. But even in these days of youthful sociability, with companions of his own age, Scott was always himself, and his imperious will often asserted itself. Writing of this time, some thirty-five years or so later, he said, "When I was a boy, and on foot expeditions, as we had many, no creature could be so indifferent which way our course was directed, and I acquiesced in what any one proposed; but if I was once

driven to make a choice, and felt piqued in honour to maintain my proposition, I have broken off from the whole party, rather than yield to any one." No doubt, too, in that day of what he himself described as "the silly smart fancies that ran in my brain like the bubbles in a glass of champagne, as brilliant to my thinking, as intoxicating, as evanescent," solitude was no real deprivation to him; and one can easily imagine him marching off on his solitary way after a dispute with his companions, reciting to himself old songs or ballads, with that "noticeable but altogether indescribable play of the upper lip," which Mr. Lockhart thinks suggested to one of Scott's most intimate friends, on his first acquaintance with him, the grotesque notion that he had been "a hautboy-player." This was the first impression formed of Scott by William Clerk, one of his earliest and life-long friends. It greatly amused Scott, who not only had never played on any instrument in his life, but could hardly make shift to join in the chorus of a popular song without marring its effect; but perhaps the impression suggested was not so very far astray after all. Looking to the poetic side of his character, the trumpet certainly would have been the instrument that would have best symbolized the spirit both of Scott's thought and of his verses. Mr. Lockhart himself, in summing up his impressions of Sir Walter, quotes as the most expressive of his lines:—

> "Sound, sound the clarion! fill the fife!
> To all the sensual world proclaim,
> One crowded hour of glorious life
> Is worth a world without a name."

And undoubtedly this gives us the key-note of Scott's personal life as well as of his poetic power. Above every-

thing he was high-spirited, a man of noble, and, at the same time, of martial feelings. Sir Francis Doyle speaks very justly of Sir Walter as "among English singers the undoubted inheritor of that trumpet-note, which, under the breath of Homer, has made the wrath of Achilles immortal;" and I do not doubt that there was something in Scott's face, and especially in the expression of his mouth, to suggest this even to his early college companions. Unfortunately, however, even "one crowded hour of glorious life" may sometimes have a "sensual" inspiration, and in these days of youthful adventure, too many such hours seem to have owed their inspiration to the Scottish peasant's chief bane, the Highland whisky. In his eager search after the old ballads of the Border, Scott had many a blithe adventure, which ended only too often in a carouse. It was soon after this time that he first began those raids into Liddesdale, of which all the world has enjoyed the records in the sketches—embodied subsequently in *Guy Mannering*—of Dandie Dinmont, his pony Dumple, and the various Peppers and Mustards from whose breed there were afterwards introduced into Scott's own family, generations of terriers, always named, as Sir Walter expressed it, after "the cruet." I must quote the now classic record of those youthful escapades:—

"Eh me," said Mr. Shortreed, his companion in all these Liddesdale raids, "sic an endless fund of humour and drollery as he had then wi' him. Never ten yards but we were either laughing or roaring and singing. Wherever we stopped, how brawlie he suited himsel' to everybody! He aye did as the lave did; never made himsel' the great man or took ony airs in the company. I've seen him in a' moods in these jaunts, grave and gay, daft and serious, sober and drunk—(this, however, even in our wildest rambles, was but rare)—but drunk or sober he was aye the gentleman. He looked excessively

heavy and stupid when he was *fou*, but he was never out o' gude humour."

One of the stories of that time will illustrate better the wilder days of Scott's youth than any comment :—

"On reaching one evening," says Mr. Lockhart, some Charlieshope or other (I forget the name) among those wildernesses, they found a kindly reception as usual: but to their agreeable surprise, after some days of hard living, a measured and orderly hospitality as respected liquor. Soon after supper, at which a bottle of elderberry wine alone had been produced, a young student of divinity who happened to be in the house was called upon to take the 'big ha' Bible,' in the good old fashion of Burns' Saturday Night: and some progress had been already made in the service, when the good man of the farm, whose 'tendency,' as Mr. Mitchell says, 'was soporific,' scandalized his wife and the dominie by starting suddenly from his knees, and rubbing his eyes, with a stentorian exclamation of 'By —— ! here's the keg at last!' and in tumbled, as he spake the word, a couple of sturdy herdsmen, whom, on hearing, a day before, of the advocate's approaching visit, he had despatched to a certain smuggler's haunt at some considerable distance in quest of a supply of *run* brandy from the Solway frith. The pious 'exercise' of the household was hopelessly interrupted. With a thousand apologies for his hitherto shabby entertainment, this jolly Elliot or Armstrong had the welcome *keg* mounted on the table without a moment's delay, and gentle and simple, not forgetting the dominie, continued carousing about it until daylight streamed in upon the party. Sir Walter Scott seldom failed, when I saw him in company with his Liddesdale companions, to mimic with infinite humour the sudden outburst of his old host on hearing the clatter of horses' feet, which he knew to indicate the arrival of the keg, the consternation of the dame, and the rueful despair with which the young clergyman closed the book."[1]

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, i. 269-71.

No wonder old Mr. Scott felt some doubt of his son's success at the bar, and thought him more fitted in many respects for a "gangrel scrape-gut."[1]

In spite of all this love of excitement, Scott became a sound lawyer, and might have been a great lawyer, had not his pride of character, the impatience of his genius, and the stir of his imagination rendered him indisposed to wait and slave in the precise manner which the prepossessions of solicitors appoint.

For Scott's passion for romantic literature was not at all the sort of thing which we ordinarily mean by boys' or girls' love of romance. No amount of drudgery or labour deterred Scott from any undertaking on the prosecution of which he was bent. He was quite the reverse, indeed, of what is usually meant by sentimental, either in his manners or his literary interests. As regards the history of his own country he was no mean antiquarian. Indeed he cared for the mustiest antiquarian researches—of the mediæval kind—so much, that in the depth of his troubles he speaks of a talk with a Scotch antiquary and herald as one of the things which soothed him most. "I do not know anything which relieves the mind so much from the sullens as trifling discussions about antiquarian *old womanries*. It is like knitting a stocking, diverting the mind without occupying it."[2] Thus his love of romantic literature was as far as possible from that of a mind which only feeds on romantic excitements; rather was it that of one who was so moulded by the transmitted and acquired love of feudal institutions with all their incidents, that he could not take any deep interest in any other

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, i. 206.
[2] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, ix. 221.

fashion of human society. Now the Scotch law was full of vestiges and records of that period,—was indeed a great standing monument of it; and in numbers of his writings Scott shows with how deep an interest he had studied the Scotch law from this point of view. He remarks somewhere that it was natural for a Scotchman to feel a strong attachment to the principle of rank, if only on the ground that almost any Scotchman might, under the Scotch law, turn out to be heir-in-tail to some great Scotch title or estate by the death of intervening relations. And the law which sometimes caused such sudden transformations, had subsequently a true interest for him of course as a novel writer, to say nothing of his interest in it as an antiquarian and historian who loved to repeople the earth, not merely with the picturesque groups of the soldiers and courts of the past, but with the actors in all the various quaint and homely transactions and puzzlements which the feudal ages had brought forth. Hence though, as a matter of fact, Scott never made much figure as an advocate, he became a very respectable, and might unquestionably have become a very great, lawyer. When he started at the bar, however, he had not acquired the tact to impress an ordinary assembly. In one case which he conducted before the General Assembly of the Kirk of Scotland, when defending a parish minister threatened with deposition for drunkenness and unseemly behaviour, he certainly missed the proper tone,—first receiving a censure for the freedom of his manner in treating the allegations against his client, and then so far collapsing under the rebuke of the Moderator, as to lose the force and urgency necessary to produce an effect on his audience. But these were merely a boy's mishaps. He was certainly by no means a Heaven-born orator, and therefore could not

expect to spring into exceptionally *early* distinction, and the only true reason for his relative failure was that he was so full of literary power, and so proudly impatient of the fetters which prudence seemed to impose on his extra-professional proceedings, that he never gained the credit he deserved for the general common sense, the unwearied industry, and the keen appreciation of the ins and outs of legal method, which might have raised him to the highest reputation even as a judge.

All readers of his novels know how Scott delights in the humours of the law. By way of illustration take the following passage, which is both short and amusing, in which Saunders Fairford—the old solicitor painted from Scott's father in *Redgauntlet*—descants on the law of the stirrup-cup. "It was decided in a case before the town bailies of Cupar Angus, when Luckie Simpson's cow had drunk up Luckie Jamieson's browst of ale, while it stood in the door to cool, that there was no damage to pay, because the crummie drank without sitting down; such being the circumstance constituting a Doch an Dorroch, which is a standing drink for which no reckoning is paid." I do not believe that any one of Scott's contemporaries had greater legal abilities than he, though, as it happened, they were never fairly tried. But he had both the pride and impatience of genius. It fretted him to feel that he was dependent on the good opinions of solicitors, and that they who were incapable of understanding his genius, thought the less instead of the better of him as an advocate, for every indication which he gave of that genius. Even on the day of his call to the bar he gave expression to a sort of humorous foretaste of this impatience, saying to William Clerk, who had been called with him, as he mimicked the air and tone of a Highland

lass waiting at the Cross of Edinburgh to be hired for the harvest, "We've stood here an hour by the Tron, hinny, and deil a ane has speered our price." Scott continued to practise at the bar—nominally at least—for fourteen years, but the most which he ever seems to have made in any one year was short of 230*l.*, and latterly his practice was much diminishing instead of increasing. His own impatience of solicitors' patronage was against him; his well-known dabblings in poetry were still more against him; and his general repute for wild and unprofessional adventurousness—which was much greater than he deserved—was probably most of all against him. Before he had been six years at the bar he joined the organization of the Edinburgh Volunteer Cavalry, took a very active part in the drill, and was made their Quartermaster. Then he visited London, and became largely known for his ballads, and his love of ballads. In his eighth year at the bar he accepted a small permanent appointment, with 300*l.* a year, as sheriff of Selkirkshire; and this occurring soon after his marriage to a lady of some means, no doubt diminished still further his professional zeal. For one third of the time during which Scott practised as an advocate he made no pretence of taking interest in that part of his work, though he was always deeply interested in the law itself. In 1806 he undertook gratuitously the duties of a Clerk of Session—a permanent officer of the Court at Edinburgh—and discharged them without remuneration for five years, from 1806 to 1811, in order to secure his ultimate succession to the office in the place of an invalid, who for that period received all the emoluments and did none of the work. Nevertheless Scott's legal abilities were so well known, that it was certainly at one time intended to offer

him a Barony of the Exchequer, and it was his own doing, apparently, that it was not offered. The life of literature and the life of the Bar hardly ever suit, and in Scott's case they suited the less, that he felt himself likely to be a dictator in the one field, and only a postulant in the other. Literature was a far greater gainer by his choice, than Law could have been a loser. For his capacity for the law he shared with thousands of able men, his capacity for literature with few or none.

## CHAPTER III

### LOVE AND MARRIAGE.

One Sunday, about two years before his call to the bar, Scott offered his umbrella to a young lady of much beauty who was coming out of the Greyfriars Church during a shower; the umbrella was graciously accepted; and it was not an unprecedented consequence that Scott fell in love with the borrower, who turned out to be Margaret, daughter of Sir John and Lady Jane Stuart Belches, of Invernay. For near six years after this, Scott indulged the hope of marrying this lady, and it does not seem doubtful that the lady herself was in part responsible for this impression. Scott's father, who thought his son's prospects very inferior to those of Miss Stuart Belches, felt it his duty to warn the baronet of his son's views, a warning which the old gentleman appears to have received with that grand unconcern characteristic of elderly persons in high position, as a hint intrinsically incredible, or at least unworthy of notice. But he took no alarm, and Scott's attentions to Margaret Stuart Belches continued till close on the eve of her marriage, in 1796, to William Forbes (afterwards Sir William Forbes), of Pitsligo, a banker, who proved to be one of Sir Walter's most generous and most delicate-minded friends, when his time of troubles came

towards the end of both their lives. Whether Scott was in part mistaken as to the impression he had made on the young lady, or she was mistaken as to the impression he had made on herself, or whether other circumstances intervened to cause misunderstanding, or the grand indifference of Sir John gave way to active intervention when the question became a practical one, the world will now never know, but it does not seem very likely that a man of so much force as Scott, who certainly had at one time assured himself at least of the young lady's strong regard, should have been easily displaced even by a rival of ability and of most generous and amiable character. An entry in the diary which Scott kept in 1827, after Constable's and Ballantyne's failure, and his wife's death, seems to me to suggest that there may have been some misunderstanding between the young people, though I am not sure that the inference is justified. The passage completes the story of this passion—Scott's first and only deep passion—so far as it can ever be known to us; and as it is a very pathetic and characteristic entry, and the attachment to which it refers had a great influence on Scott's life, both in keeping him free from some of the most dangerous temptations of the young, during his youth, and in creating within him an interior world of dreams and recollections throughout his whole life, on which his imaginative nature was continually fed—I may as well give it. "He had taken," says Mr. Lockhart, "for that winter [1827], the house No. 6, Shandwick Place, which he occupied by the month during the remainder of his servitude as a clerk of session. Very near this house, he was told a few days after he took possession, dwelt the aged mother of his first love; and he expressed to his friend Mrs.

Skene, a wish that she should carry him to renew an acquaintance which seems to have been interrupted from the period of his youthful romance. Mrs. Skene complied with his desire, and she tells me that a very painful scene ensued." His diary says,—"November 7th. Began to settle myself this morning after the hurry of mind and even of body which I have lately undergone. I went to make a visit and fairly softened myself, like an old fool, with recalling old stories till I was fit for nothing but shedding tears and repeating verses for the whole night. This is sad work. The very grave gives up its dead, and time rolls back thirty years to add to my perplexities. I don't care. I begin to grow case-hardened, and like a stag turning at bay, my naturally good temper grows fierce and dangerous. Yet what a romance to tell—and told I fear it will one day be. And then my three years of dreaming and my two years of wakening will be chronicled, doubtless. But the dead will feel no pain.—November 10th. At twelve o'clock I went again to poor Lady Jane to talk over old stories. I am not clear that it is a right or healthful indulgence to be ripping up old sores, but it seems to give her deep-rooted sorrow words, and that is a mental blood-letting. To me these things are now matter of calm and solemn recollection, never to be forgotten, yet scarce to be remembered with pain."[1] It was in 1797, after the break-up of his hopes in relation to this attachment, that Scott wrote the lines *To a Violet*, which Mr. F. T. Palgrave, in his thoughtful and striking introduction to Scott's poems, rightly characterizes as one of the most beautiful of those poems. It is, however, far from one character-

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, ix. 183-4.

istic of Scott, indeed, so different in style from the best of his other poems, that Mr. Browning might well have said of Scott, as he once affirmed of himself, that for the purpose of one particular poem, he "who blows through bronze," had "breathed through silver,"—had "curbed the liberal hand subservient proudly,"—and tamed his spirit to a key elsewhere unknown.

"The violet in her greenwood bower,
Where birchen boughs with hazels mingle,
May boast itself the fairest flower
In glen, or copse, or forest dingle.

"Though fair her gems of azure hue,
Beneath the dewdrop's weight reclining,
I've seen an eye of lovelier blue,
More sweet through watery lustre shining.

"The summer sun that dew shall dry,
Ere yet the day be past its morrow;
Nor longer in my false love's eye
Remain'd the tear of parting sorrow."

These lines obviously betray a feeling of resentment, which may or may not have been justified; but they are perhaps the most delicate produced by his pen. The pride which was always so notable a feature in Scott, probably sustained him through the keen, inward pain which it is very certain from a great many of his own words that he must have suffered in this uprooting of his most passionate hopes. And it was in part probably the same pride which led him to form, within the year, a new tie—his engagement to Mademoiselle Charpentier, or Miss Carpenter as she was usually called,—the daughter of a French royalist of Lyons who had died early in the revolution. She had come after her father's death to England, chiefly, it seems, because in the Marquis of Down-

shire, who was an old friend of the family, her mother knew that she should find a protector for her children. Miss Carpenter was a lively beauty, probably of no great depth of character. The few letters given of hers in Mr. Lockhart's life of Scott, give the impression of an amiable, petted girl, of somewhat thin and *espiègle* character, who was rather charmed at the depth and intensity of Scott's nature, and at the expectations which he seemed to form of what love should mean, than capable of realizing them. Evidently she had no inconsiderable pleasure in display; but she made on the whole a very good wife, only one to be protected by him from every care, and not one to share Scott's deeper anxieties, or to participate in his dreams. Yet Mrs. Scott was not devoid of spirit and self-control. For instance, when Mr. Jeffrey, having reviewed *Marmion* in the *Edinburgh* in that depreciating and omniscient tone which was then considered the evidence of critical acumen, dined with Scott on the very day on which the review had appeared, Mrs. Scott behaved to him through the whole evening with the greatest politeness, but fired this parting shot in her broken English, as he took his leave, — "Well, good night, Mr. Jeffrey, — dey tell me you have abused Scott in de *Review*, and I hope Mr. Constable has paid you very well for writing it." It is hinted that Mrs. Scott was, at the time of Scott's greatest fame, far more exhilarated by it than her husband with his strong sense and sure self-measurement ever was. Mr. Lockhart records that Mrs. Grant of Laggan once said of them, "Mr. Scott always seems to me like a glass, through which the rays of admiration pass without sensibly affecting it; but the bit of paper that lies beside it will presently be in a blaze, and no wonder." The bit of paper, however, never was in a blaze that I know of;

and possibly Mrs. Grant's remark may have had a little feminine spite in it. At all events, it was not till the rays of misfortune, instead of admiration, fell upon Scott's life, that the delicate tissue paper shrivelled up; nor does it seem that, even then, it was the trouble, so much as a serious malady that had fixed on Lady Scott before Sir Walter's troubles began, which really scorched up her life. That she did not feel with the depth and intensity of her husband, or in the same key of feeling, is clear. After the failure, and during the preparations for abandoning the house in Edinburgh, Scott records in his diary :-- "It is with a sense of pain that I leave behind a parcel of trumpery prints and little ornaments, once the pride of Lady Scott's heart, but which she saw consigned with indifference to the chance of an auction. Things that have had their day of importance with me, I cannot forget, though the merest trifles; but I am glad that she, with bad health, and enough to vex her, has not the same useless mode of associating recollections with this unpleasant business." [1]

Poor Lady Scott! It was rather like a bird of paradise mating with an eagle. Yet the result was happy on the whole; for she had a thoroughly kindly nature, and a true heart. Within ten days before her death, Scott enters in his diary :—"Still welcoming me with a smile, and asserting she is better." She was not the ideal wife for Scott; but she loved him, sunned herself in his prosperity, and tried to bear his adversity cheerfully. In her last illness she would always reproach her husband and children for their melancholy faces, even when that melancholy was, as she well knew, due to the approaching shadow of her own death.

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, viii. 273.

## CHAPTER IV.

### EARLIEST POETRY AND BORDER MINSTRELSY.

Scott's first serious attempt in poetry was a version of Bürger's *Lenore*, a spectre-ballad of the violent kind, much in favour in Germany at a somewhat earlier period, but certainly not a specimen of the higher order of imaginative genius. However, it stirred Scott's youthful blood, and made him "wish to heaven he could get a skull and two cross-bones!" a modest desire, to be expressed with so much fervour, and one almost immediately gratified. Probably no one ever gave a more spirited version of Bürger's ballad than Scott has given; but the use to which Miss Cranstoun, a friend and confidante of his love for Miss Stuart Belches, strove to turn it, by getting it printed, blazoned, and richly bound, and presenting it to the young lady as a proof of her admirer's abilities, was perhaps hardly very sagacious. It is quite possible, at least, that Miss Stuart Belches may have regarded this vehement admirer of spectral wedding journeys and skeleton bridals, as unlikely to prepare for her that comfortable, trim, and decorous future which young ladies usually desire. At any rate, the bold stroke failed. The young lady admired the verses, but, as we have seen, declined the translator. Perhaps she regarded banking as safer, if less brilliant work than the most

effective description of skeleton riders. Indeed, Scott at this time—to those who did not know what was in him, which no one, not even excepting himself, did—had no very sure prospects of comfort, to say nothing of wealth. It is curious, too, that his first adventure in literature was thus connected with his interest in the preternatural, for no man ever lived whose genius was sounder and healthier and less disposed to dwell on the half-and-half lights of a dim and eerie world; yet ghostly subjects always interested him deeply, and he often touched them in his stories, more, I think, from the strong artistic contrast they afforded to his favourite conceptions of life, than from any other motive. There never was, I fancy, an organization less susceptible of this order of fears and superstitions than his own. When a friend jokingly urged him, within a few months of his death, not to leave Rome on a Friday, as it was a day of bad omen for a journey, he replied, laughing, "Superstition is very picturesque, and I make it, at times, stand me in great stead, but I never allow it to interfere with interest or convenience." Basil Hall reports Scott's having told him on the last evening of the year 1824, when they were talking over this subject, that "having once arrived at a country inn, he was told there was no bed for him. 'No place to lie down at all?' said he. 'No,' said the people of the house; 'none, except a room in which there is a corpse lying.' 'Well,' said he, 'did the person die of any contagious disorder?' 'Oh, no; not at all,' said they. 'Well, then,' continued he, 'let me have the other bed. So,' said Sir Walter, 'I laid me down, and never had a better night's sleep in my life.'" He was, indeed, a man of iron nerve, whose truest artistic enjoyment was in noting the forms of character seen in full daylight by the light of the most ordinary experience.

Perhaps for that reason he can on occasion relate a preternatural incident, such as the appearance of old Alice at the fountain, at the very moment of her death, to the Master of Ravenswood, in *The Bride of Lammermoor*, with great effect. It was probably the vivacity with which he realized the violence which such incidents do to the terrestrial common sense of our ordinary nature, and at the same time the sedulous accuracy of detail with which he narrated them, rather than any, even the smallest, special susceptibility of his own brain to thrills of the preternatural kind, which gave him rather a unique pleasure in dealing with such preternatural elements. Sometimes, however, his ghosts are a little too muscular to produce their due effect as ghosts. In translating Bürger's ballad his great success lay in the vividness of the spectre's horsemanship. For instance,—

> "Tramp! tramp! along the land they rode,
> Splash! splash! along the sea;
> The scourge is red, the spur drops blood,
> The flashing pebbles flee,"

is far better than any ghostly touch in it; so, too, every one will remember how spirited a rider is the white Lady of Avenel, in *The Monastery*, and how vigorously she takes fords,—as vigorously as the sheriff himself, who was very fond of fords. On the whole, Scott was too sunny and healthy-minded for a ghost-seer; and the skull and cross-bones with which he ornamented his "den" in his father's house, did not succeed in tempting him into the world of twilight and cobwebs wherein he made his first literary excursion. His *William and Helen*, the name he gave to his translation of Bürger's *Lenore*, made in 1795, was effective, after all, more for its rapid movement, than for the weirdness of its effects.

If, however, it was the raw preternaturalism of such ballads as Bürger's which first led Scott to test his own powers, his genius soon turned to more appropriate and natural subjects. Ever since his earliest college days he had been collecting, in those excursions of his into Liddesdale and elsewhere, materials for a book on *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border;* and the publication of this work, in January, 1802 (in two volumes at first), was his first great literary success. The whole edition of eight hundred copies was sold within the year, while the skill and care which Scott had devoted to the historical illustration of the ballads, and the force and spirit of his own new ballads, written in imitation of the old, gained him at once a very high literary name. And the name was well deserved. The *Border Minstrelsy* was more commensurate *in range* with the genius of Scott, than even the romantic poems by which it was soon followed, and which were received with such universal and almost unparalleled delight. For Scott's *Border Minstrelsy* gives more than a glimpse of all his many great powers—his historical industry and knowledge, his masculine humour, his delight in restoring the vision of the "old, simple, violent world" of rugged activity and excitement, as well as that power to kindle men's hearts, as by a trumpet-call, which was the chief secret of the charm of his own greatest poems. It is much easier to discern the great novelist of subsequent years in the *Border Minstrelsy* than even in *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, *Marmion*, and *The Lady of the Lake* taken together. From those romantic poems you would never guess that Scott entered more eagerly and heartily into the common incidents and common cares of every-day human life than into the most romantic fortunes; from them you would never know how com-

pletely he had mastered the leading features of quite different periods of our history; from them you would never infer that you had before you one of the best plodders, as well as one of the most enthusiastic dreamers, in British literature. But all this might have been gathered from the various introductions and notes to the *Border Minstrelsy*, which are full of skilful illustrations, of comments teeming with humour, and of historic weight. The general introduction gives us a general survey of the graphic pictures of Border quarrels, their simple violence and simple cunning. It enters, for instance, with grave humour into the strong distinction taken in the debatable land between a "freebooter" and a "thief," and the difficulty which the inland counties had in grasping it, and paints for us, with great vivacity, the various Border superstitions. Another commentary on a very amusing ballad, commemorating the manner in which a blind harper stole a horse and got paid for a mare he had not lost, gives an account of the curious tenure of land, called that of the "king's rentallers," or "kindly tenants;" and a third describes, in language as vivid as the historical romance of *Kenilworth*, written years after, the manner in which Queen Elizabeth received the news of a check to her policy, and vented her spleen on the King of Scotland.

So much as to the breadth of the literary area which this first book of Scott's covered. As regards the poetic power which his own new ballads, in imitation of the old ones, evinced, I cannot say that those of the first issue of the *Border Minstrelsy* indicated anything like the force which might have been expected from one who was so soon to be the author of *Marmion*, though many of Scott's warmest admirers, including Sir Francis Doyle, seem to place *Glenfinlas* among his finest productions. But

in the third volume of the *Border Minstrelsy*, which did not appear till 1803, is contained a ballad on the assassination of the Regent Murray, the story being told by his assassin, which seems to me a specimen of his very highest poetical powers. In *Cadyow Castle* you have not only that rousing trumpet-note which you hear in *Marmion*, but the pomp and glitter of a grand martial scene is painted with all Scott's peculiar terseness and vigour. The opening is singularly happy in preparing the reader for the description of a violent deed. The Earl of Arran, chief of the clan of Hamiltons, is chasing among the old oaks of Cadyow Castle,—oaks which belonged to the ancient Caledonian forest,—the fierce, wild bulls, milk-white, with black muzzles, which were not extirpated till shortly before Scott's own birth :—

"Through the huge oaks of Evandale,
Whose limbs a thousand years have worn,
What sullen roar comes down the gale,
And drowns the hunter's pealing horn?

"Mightiest of all the beasts of chase
That roam in woody Caledon,
Crashing the forest in his race,
The mountain bull comes thundering on.

"Fierce on the hunter's quiver'd band
He rolls his eyes of swarthy glow,
Spurns, with black hoof and horn, the sand
And tosses high his mane of snow.

"Aim'd well, the chieftain's lance has flown;
Struggling in blood the savage lies;
His roar is sunk in hollow groan,—
Sound, merry huntsman! sound the pryse!"

It is while the hunters are resting after this feat, that Bothwellhaugh dashes among them headlong, spurring his jaded steed with poniard instead of spur :—

"From gory selle and reeling steed,
Sprang the fierce horseman with a bound,
And reeking from the recent deed,
He dash'd his carbine on the ground."

And then Bothwellhaugh tells his tale of blood, describing the procession from which he had singled out his prey:—

"'Dark Morton, girt with many a spear,
Murder's foul minion, led the van;
And clash'd their broadswords in the rear
The wild Macfarlanes' plaided clan.

"'Glencairn and stout Parkhead were nigh,
Obsequious at their Regent's rein,
And haggard Lindsay's iron eye,
That saw fair Mary weep in vain.

"''Mid pennon'd spears, a steely grove,
Proud Murray's plumage floated high;
Scarce could his trampling charger move,
So close the minions crowded nigh.

"'From the raised vizor's shade, his eye,
Dark rolling, glanced the ranks along,
And his steel truncheon waved on high,
Seem'd marshalling the iron throng.

"'But yet his sadden'd brow confess'd
A passing shade of doubt and awe;
Some fiend was whispering in his breast,
"Beware of injured Bothwellhaugh!"

"'The death-shot parts,—the charger springs,—
Wild rises tumult's startling roar!
And Murray's plumy helmet rings—
Rings on the ground to rise no more.'"

This was the ballad which made so strong an impression on Thomas Campbell, the poet. Referring to some of the

lines I have quoted, Campbell said,—"I have repeated them so often on the North Bridge that the whole fraternity of coachmen know me by tongue as I pass. To be sure, to a mind in sober, serious, street-walking humour, it must bear an appearance of lunacy when one stamps with the hurried pace and fervent shake of the head which strong, pithy poetry excites."[1] I suppose anecdotes of this kind have been oftener told of Scott than of any other English poet. Indeed, Sir Walter, who understood himself well, gives the explanation in one of his diaries:—"I am sensible," he says, "that if there be anything good about my poetry or prose either, it is a hurried frankness of composition, which pleases soldiers, sailors, and young people of bold and active dispositions."[2] He might have included old people too. I have heard of two old men—complete strangers—passing each other on a dark London night, when one of them happened to be repeating to himself, just as Campbell did to the hackney coachmen of the North Bridge of Edinburgh, the last lines of the account of Flodden Field in *Marmion*, "Charge, Chester, charge," when suddenly a reply came out of the darkness, "On, Stanley, on," whereupon they finished the death of Marmion between them, took off their hats to each other, and parted, laughing. Scott's is almost the only poetry in the English language that not only runs thus in the head of average men, but heats the head in which it runs by the mere force of its hurried frankness of style, to use Scott's own terms, or by that of its strong and pithy eloquence, as Campbell phrased it. And in *Cadyow Castle* this style is at its culminating point.

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, ii. 79.
[2] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, viii. 370.

## CHAPTER V.

### SCOTT'S MATURER POEMS.

Scott's genius flowered late. *Cadyow Castle*, the first of his poems, I think, that has indisputable genius plainly stamped on its terse and fiery lines, was composed in 1802, when he was already thirty-one years of age. It was in the same year that he wrote the first canto of his first great romance in verse, *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, a poem which did not appear till 1805, when he was thirty-four. The first canto (not including the framework, of which the aged harper is the principal figure) was written in the lodgings to which he was confined for a fortnight in 1802, by a kick received from a horse on Portobello sands, during a charge of the Volunteer Cavalry in which Scott was cornet. The poem was originally intended to be included in the *Border Minstrelsy*, as one of the studies in the antique style, but soon outgrew the limits of such a study both in length and in the freedom of its manner. Both the poorest and the best parts of *The Lay* were in a special manner due to Lady Dalkeith (afterwards Duchess of Buccleugh), who suggested it, and in whose honour the poem was written. It was she who requested Scott to write a poem on the legend of the goblin page, Gilpin Horner, and this Scott attempted,—and, so far as the goblin himself was concerned, conspicuously

failed. He himself clearly saw that the story of this unmanageable imp was both confused and uninteresting, and that in fact he had to extricate himself from the original groundwork of the tale, as from a regular literary scrape, in the best way he could. In a letter to Miss Seward, Scott says,—"At length the story appeared so uncouth that I was fain to put it into the mouth of my old minstrel, lest the nature of it should be misunderstood, and I should be suspected of setting up a new school of poetry, instead of a feeble attempt to imitate the old. In the process of the romance, the page, intended to be a principal person in the work, contrived (from the baseness of his natural propensities, I suppose) to slink down stairs into the kitchen, and now he must e'en abide there."[1] And I venture to say that no reader of the poem ever has distinctly understood what the goblin page did or did not do, what it was that was "lost" throughout the poem and "found" at the conclusion, what was the object of his personating the young heir of the house of Scott, and whether or not that object was answered;—what use, if any, the magic book of Michael Scott was to the Lady of Branksome, or whether it was only harm to her; and I doubt moreover whether any one ever cared an iota what answer, or whether any answer, might be given to any of these questions. All this, as Scott himself clearly perceived, was left confused, and not simply vague. The goblin imp had been more certainly an imp of mischief to him than even to his boyish ancestor. But if Lady Dalkeith suggested the poorest part of the poem, she certainly inspired its best part. Scott says, as we have seen, that he brought in the aged harper to save himself

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, ii. 217.

from the imputation of "setting up a new school of poetry" instead of humbly imitating an old school. But I think that the chivalrous wish to do honour to Lady Dalkeith, both as a personal friend and as the wife of his "chief,"—as he always called the head of the house of Scott,—had more to do with the introduction of the aged harper, than the wish to guard himself against the imputation of attempting a new poetic style. He clearly intended the Duchess of *The Lay* to represent the Countess for whom he wrote it, and the aged harper, with his reverence and gratitude and self-distrust, was only the disguise in which he felt that he could best pour out his loyalty, and the romantic devotion with which both Lord and Lady Dalkeith, but especially the latter, had inspired him. It was certainly this beautiful framework which assured the immediate success and permanent charm of the poem; and the immediate success was for that day something marvellous. The magnificent quarto edition of 750 copies was soon exhausted, and an octavo edition of 1500 copies was sold out within the year. In the following year two editions, containing together 4250 copies, were disposed of, and before twenty-five years had elapsed, that is, before 1830, 44,000 copies of the poem had been bought by the public in this country, taking account of the legitimate trade alone. Scott gained in all by *The Lay* 769*l.*, an unprecedented sum in those times for an author to obtain from any poem. Little more than half a century before, Johnson received but fifteen guineas for his stately poem on *The Vanity of Human Wishes*, and but ten guineas for his *London*. I do not say that Scott's poem had not much more in it of true poetic fire, though Scott himself, I believe, preferred these poems of Johnson's to anything that he himself ever wrote. But the disproportion in

the reward was certainly enormous, and yet what Scott gained by his *Lay* was of course much less than he gained by any of his subsequent poems of equal, or anything like equal, length. Thus for *Marmion* he received 1000 guineas long before the poem was published, and for *one half* of the copyright of *The Lord of the Isles* Constable paid Scott 1500 guineas. If we ask ourselves to what this vast popularity of Scott's poems, and especially of the earlier of them (for, as often happens, he was better remunerated for his later and much inferior poems than for his earlier and more brilliant productions) is due, I think the answer must be for the most part, the high romantic glow and extraordinary romantic simplicity of the poetical elements they contained. Take the old harper of *The Lay*, a figure which arrested the attention of Pitt during even that last most anxious year of his anxious life, the year of Ulm and Austerlitz. The lines in which Scott describes the old man's embarrassment when first urged to play, produced on Pitt, according to his own account, "an effect which I might have expected in painting, but could never have fancied capable of being given in poetry."[1]

Every one knows the lines to which Pitt refers :—

> "The humble boon was soon obtain'd;
> The aged minstrel audience gain'd.
> But, when he reach'd the room of state,
> Where she with all her ladies sate,
> Perchance he wish'd his boon denied;
> For, when to tune the harp he tried,
> His trembling hand had lost the ease
> Which marks security to please;
> And scenes long past, of joy and pain,
> Came wildering o'er his aged brain,—
> He tried to tune his harp in vain!

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, ii. 226.

The pitying Duchess praised its chime,
And gave him heart, and gave him time,
Till every string's according glee
Was blended into harmony.
And then, he said, he would full fain
He could recall an ancient strain
He never thought to sing again.
It was not framed for village churls,
But for high dames and mighty earls;
He'd play'd it to King Charles the Good,
When he kept Court at Holyrood;
And much he wish'd, yet fear'd, to try
The long-forgotten melody.
Amid the strings his fingers stray'd,
And an uncertain warbling made,
And oft he shook his hoary head.
But when he caught the measure wild
The old man raised his face, and smiled;
And lighten'd up his faded eye,
With all a poet's ecstasy!
In varying cadence, soft or strong,
He swept the sounding chords along;
The present scene, the future lot,
His toils, his wants, were all forgot;
Cold diffidence and age's frost
In the full tide of song were lost;
Each blank in faithless memory void
The poet's glowing thought supplied;
And, while his harp responsive rung,
'Twas thus the latest minstrel sung.

* * * * * *

Here paused the harp; and with its swell
The master's fire and courage fell;
Dejectedly and low he bow'd,
And, gazing timid on the crowd,
He seem'd to seek in every eye
If they approved his minstrelsy;
And, diffident of present praise,
Somewhat he spoke of former days,
And how old age, and wandering long,
Had done his hand and harp some wrong.'

These lines hardly illustrate, I think, the particular form of Mr. Pitt's criticism, for a quick succession of fine shades of feeling of this kind could never have been delineated in a painting, or indeed in a series of paintings. at all, while they *are* so given in the poem. But the praise itself, if not its exact form, is amply deserved. The singular depth of the romantic glow in this passage, and its equally singular simplicity,—a simplicity which makes it intelligible to every one,—are conspicuous to every reader. It is not what is called classical poetry, for there is no severe outline,—no sculptured completeness and repose,—no satisfying wholeness of effect to the eye of the mind,—no embodiment of a great action. The poet gives us a breath, a ripple of alternating fear and hope in the heart of an old man, and that is all. He catches an emotion that had its roots deep in the past, and that is striving onward towards something in the future;—he traces the wistfulness and self-distrust with which age seeks to recover the feelings of youth,—the delight with which it greets them when they come,—the hesitation and diffidence with which it recalls them as they pass away, and questions the triumph it has just won,—and he paints all this without subtlety, without complexity, but with a swiftness such as few poets ever surpassed. Generally, however, Scott prefers action itself for his subject, to any feeling, however active in its bent. The cases in which he makes a study of any mood of feeling, as he does of this harper's feeling, are comparatively rare. Deloraine's night-ride to Melrose is a good deal more in Scott's ordinary way, than this study of the old harper's wistful mood. But whatever his subject, his treatment of it is the same. His lines are always strongly drawn; his handling is always simple; and his subject always

romantic. But though romantic, it is simple almost to bareness,—one of the great causes both of his popularity, and of that deficiency in his poetry of which so many of his admirers become conscious when they compare him with other and richer poets. Scott used to say that in poetry Byron "bet" him; and no doubt that in which chiefly as a poet he "bet" him, was in the variety, the richness, the lustre of his effects. A certain ruggedness and bareness was of the essence of Scott's idealism and romance. It was so in relation to scenery. He told Washington Irving that he loved the very nakedness of the Border country. "It has something," he said, "bold and stern and solitary about it. When I have been for some time in the rich scenery about Edinburgh, which is like ornamented garden-land, I begin to wish myself back again among my honest grey hills, and if I did not see the heather at least once a year, *I think I should die.*" Now, the bareness which Scott so loved in his native scenery, there is in all his romantic elements of feeling. It is while he is bold and stern, that he is at his highest ideal point. Directly he begins to attempt rich or pretty subjects, as in parts of *The Lady of the Lake*, and a good deal of *The Lord of the Isles*, and still more in *The Bridal of Triermain*, his charm disappears. It is in painting those moods and exploits, in relation to which Scott shares most completely the feelings of ordinary men, but experiences them with far greater strength and purity than ordinary men, that he triumphs as a poet. Mr. Lockhart tells us that some of Scott's senses were decidedly "blunt," and one seems to recognize this in the simplicity of his romantic effects. "It is a fact," he says,

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, v. 248.

"which some philosophers may think worth setting down, that Scott's organization, as to more than one of the senses, was the reverse of exquisite. He had very little of what musicians call an ear; his smell was hardly more delicate. I have seen him stare about, quite unconscious of the cause, when his whole company betrayed their uneasiness at the approach of an overkept haunch of venison; and neither by the nose nor the palate could he distinguish corked wine from sound. He could never tell Madeira from sherry,—nay, an Oriental friend having sent him a butt of *sheeraz*, when he remembered the circumstance some time afterwards and called for a bottle to have Sir John Malcolm's opinion of its quality, it turned out that his butler, mistaking the label, had already served up half the bin as *sherry*. Port he considered as physic . . . . in truth he liked no wines except sparkling champagne and claret; but even as to the last he was no connoisseur, and sincerely preferred a tumbler of whisky-toddy to the most precious 'liquid-ruby' that ever flowed in the cup of a prince." [1]

However, Scott's eye was very keen:—"*It was commonly him*," as his little son once said, "*that saw the hare sitting.*" And his perception of colour was very delicate as well as his mere sight. As Mr. Ruskin has pointed out, his landscape painting is almost all done by the lucid use of colour. Nevertheless this bluntness of organization in relation to the less important senses, no doubt contributed something to the singleness and simplicity of the deeper and more vital of Scott's romantic impressions; at least there is good reason to suppose that delicate and complicated susceptibilities do at least

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, v. 338.

diminish the chance of living a strong and concentrated life—do risk the frittering away of feeling on the mere backwaters of sensations, even if they do not directly tend towards artificial and indirect forms of character. Scott's romance is like his native scenery,—bold, bare and rugged, with a swift deep stream of strong pure feeling running through it. There is plenty of colour in his pictures, as there is on the Scotch hills when the heather is out. And so too there is plenty of intensity in his romantic situations; but it is the intensity of simple, natural, unsophisticated, hardy, and manly characters. But as for subtleties and fine shades of feeling in his poems, or anything like the manifold harmonies of the richer arts, they are not to be found, or, if such complicated shading is to be found—and it is perhaps attempted in some faint measure in *The Bridal of Triermain*, the poem in which Scott tried to pass himself off for Erskine,—it is only at the expense of the higher qualities of his romantic poetry, that even in this small measure it is supplied. Again, there is no rich music in his verse. It is its rapid onset, its hurrying strength, which so fixes it in the mind.

It was not till 1808, three years after the publication of *The Lay*, that *Marmion*, Scott's greatest poem, was published. But I may as well say what seems necessary of that and his other poems, while I am on the subject of his poetry. *Marmion* has all the advantage over *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* that a coherent story told with force and fulness, and concerned with the same class of subjects as *The Lay*, must have over a confused and ill-managed legend, the only original purpose of which was to serve as the opportunity for a picture of Border life and strife. Scott's poems have sometimes been depreciated as mere

*novelettes* in verse, and I think that some of them may be more or less liable to this criticism. For instance, *The Lady of the Lake*, with the exception of two or three brilliant passages, has always seemed to me more of a versified *novelette*,—without the higher and broader characteristics of Scott's prose novels—than of a poem. I suppose what one expects from a poem as distinguished from a romance—even though the poem incorporates a story—is that it should not rest for its chief interest on the mere development of the story; but rather that the narrative should be quite subordinate to that insight into the deeper side of life and manners, in expressing which poetry has so great an advantage over prose. Of *The Lay* and *Marmion* this is true; less true of *The Lady of the Lake*, and still less of *Rokeby*, or *The Lord of the Isles*, and this is why *The Lay* and *Marmion* seem so much superior as poems to the others. They lean less on the interest of mere incident, more on that of romantic feeling and the great social and historic features of the day. *Marmion* was composed in great part in the saddle, and the stir of a charge of cavalry seems to be at the very core of it. "For myself," said Scott, writing to a lady correspondent at a time when he was in active service as a volunteer, "I must own that to one who has, like myself, *la tête un peu exaltée*, the pomp and circumstance of war gives, for a time, a very poignant and pleasing sensation."[1] And you feel this all through *Marmion* even more than in *The Lay*. Mr. Darwin would probably say that Auld Wat of Harden had about as much responsibility for *Marmion* as Sir Walter himself. "You will expect," he wrote to the same lady, who was personally unknown to him at that time,

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, ii. 137.

"to see a person who had dedicated himself to literary pursuits, and you will find me a rattle-skulled, half-lawyer, half-sportsman, through whose head a regiment of horse has been exercising since he was five years old."[1] And what Scott himself felt in relation to the martial elements of his poetry, soldiers in the field felt with equal force. "In the course of the day when *The Lady of the Lake* first reached Sir Adam Fergusson, he was posted with his company on a point of ground exposed to the enemy's artillery, somewhere no doubt on the lines of Torres Vedras. The men were ordered to lie prostrate on the ground; while they kept that attitude, the captain, kneeling at the head, read aloud the description of the battle in Canto VI., and the listening soldiers only interrupted him by a joyous huzza when the French shot struck the bank close above them."[2] It is not often that martial poetry has been put to such a test; but we can well understand with what rapture a Scotch force lying on the ground to shelter from the French fire, would enter into such passages as the following:—

"Their light-arm'd archers far and near
Survey'd the tangled ground,
Their centre ranks, with pike and spear,
A twilight forest frown'd,
Their barbèd horsemen, in the rear,
The stern battalia crown'd.
No cymbal clash'd, no clarion rang,
Still were the pipe and drum;
Save heavy tread, and armour's clang,
The sullen march was dumb.
There breathed no wind their crests to shake,
Or wave their flags abroad;
Scarce the frail aspen seem'd to quake,
That shadow'd o'er their road.

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, ii. 259.
[2] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, iii. 327.

Their vanward scouts no tidings bring,
Can rouse no lurking foe,
Nor spy a trace of living thing
Save when they stirr'd the roe;
The host moves like a deep-sea wave,
Where rise no rocks its power to brave,
High-swelling, dark, and slow.
The lake is pass'd, and now they gain
A narrow and a broken plain,
Before the Trosach's rugged jaws,
And here the horse and spearmen pause,
While, to explore the dangerous glen,
Dive through the pass the archer-men.

"At once there rose so wild a yell
Within that dark and narrow dell,
As all the fiends from heaven that fell
Had peal'd the banner-cry of Hell!
Forth from the pass, in tumult driven,
Like chaff before the wind of heaven,
The archery appear;
For life! for life! their plight they ply,
And shriek, and shout, and battle-cry,
And plaids and bonnets waving high,
And broadswords flashing to the sky,
Are maddening in the rear.
Onward they drive, in dreadful race,
Pursuers and pursued;
Before that tide of flight and chase,
How shall it keep its rooted place,
The spearmen's twilight wood?
Down, down, cried Mar, 'your lances down
Bear back both friend and foe!'
Like reeds before the tempest's frown,
That serried grove of lances brown
At once lay levell'd low;
And, closely shouldering side to side,
The bristling ranks the onset bide,—
'We'll quell the savage mountaineer,
As their Tinchel cows the game!
They came as fleet as forest deer,
We'll drive them back as tame.'"

But admirable in its stern and deep excitement as that is, the battle of Flodden in *Marmion* passes it in vigour, and constitutes perhaps the most perfect description of war by one who was—almost—both poet and warrior, which the English language contains.

And *Marmion* registers the high-water mark of Scott's poetical power, not only in relation to the painting of war, but in relation to the painting of nature. Critics from the beginning onwards have complained of the six introductory epistles, as breaking the unity of the story. But I cannot see that the remark has weight. No poem is written for those who read it as they do a novel—merely to follow the interest of the story; or if any poem be written for such readers, it deserves to die. On such a principle—which treats a poem as a mere novel and nothing else,—you might object to Homer that he interrupts the battle so often to dwell on the origin of the heroes who are waging it; or to Byron that he deserts Childe Harold to meditate on the rapture of solitude. To my mind the ease and frankness of these confessions of the author's recollections give a picture of his life and character while writing *Marmion*, which adds greatly to its attraction as a poem. You have a picture at once not only of the scenery, but of the mind in which that scenery is mirrored, and are brought back frankly, at fit intervals, from the one to the other, in the mode best adapted to help you to appreciate the relation of the poet to the poem. At least if Milton's various interruptions of a much more ambitious theme, to muse upon his own qualifications or disqualifications for the task he had attempted, be not artistic mistakes—and I never heard of any one who thought them so—I cannot see any reason why Scott's periodic

recurrence to his own personal history should be artistic mistakes either. If Scott's reverie was less lofty than Milton's, so also was his story. It seems to me as fitting to describe the relation between the poet and his theme in the one case as in the other. What can be more truly a part of *Marmion*, as a poem, though not as a story, than that introduction to the first canto in which Scott expresses his passionate sympathy with the high national feeling of the moment, in his tribute to Pitt and Fox, and then reproaches himself for attempting so great a subject and returns to what he calls his "rude legend," the very essence of which was, however, a passionate appeal to the spirit of national independence? What can be more germane to the poem than the delineation of the strength the poet had derived from musing in the bare and rugged solitudes of St. Mary's Lake, in the introduction to the second canto? Or than the striking autobiographical study of his own infancy which I have before extracted from the introduction to the third? It seems to me that *Marmion* without these introductions would be like the hills which border Yarrow, without the stream and lake in which they are reflected.

Never at all events in any later poem was Scott's touch as a mere painter so terse and strong. What a picture of a Scotch winter is given in these few lines:—

> "The sheep before the pinching heaven
> To shelter'd dale and down are driven,
> Where yet some faded herbage pines,
> And yet a watery sunbeam shines:
> In meek despondency they eye
> The wither'd sward and wintry sky,
> And from beneath their summer hill
> Stray sadly by Glenkinnon's rill."

Again, if Scott is ever Homeric (which I cannot think

he often is, in spite of Sir Francis Doyle's able criticism,—(he is too short, too sharp, and too eagerly bent on his rugged way, for a poet who is always delighting to find loopholes, even in battle, from which to look out upon the great story of human nature), he is certainly nearest to it in such a passage as this:—

> "The Isles-men carried at their backs
> The ancient Danish battle-axe.
> They raised a wild and wondering cry
> As with his guide rode Marmion by.
> Loud were their clamouring tongues, as when
> The clanging sea-fowl leave the fen,
> And, with their cries discordant mix'd,
> Grumbled and yell'd the pipes betwixt."

In hardly any of Scott's poetry do we find much of what is called the *curiosa felicitas* of expression,—the magic use of *words*, as distinguished from the mere general effect of vigour, purity, and concentration of purpose. But in *Marmion* occasionally we do find such a use. Take this description, for instance, of the Scotch tents near Edinburgh:—

> "A thousand did I say? I ween
> Thousands on thousands there were seen,
> That chequer'd all the heath between
> The streamlet and the town;
> In crossing ranks extending far,
> Forming a camp irregular;
> Oft giving way where still there stood
> Some relics of the old oak wood,
> That darkly huge did intervene,
> *And tamed the glaring white with green;*
> In these extended lines there lay
> A martial kingdom's vast array."

The line I have italicized seems to me to have more of the poet's special magic of expression than is at all usual

with Scott. The conception of the peaceful green oak-wood *taming* the glaring white of the tented field, is as fine in idea as it is in relation to the effect of the mere colour on the eye. Judge Scott's poetry by whatever test you will—whether it be a test of that which is peculiar to it, its glow of national feeling, its martial ardour, its swift and rugged simplicity, or whether it be a test of that which is common to it with most other poetry, its attraction for all romantic excitements, its special feeling for the pomp and circumstance of war, its love of light and colour—and tested either way, *Marmion* will remain his finest poem. The battle of Flodden Field touches his highest point in its expression of stern patriotic feeling, in its passionate love of daring, and in the force and swiftness of its movement, no less than in the brilliancy of its romantic interests, the charm of its picturesque detail, and the glow of its scenic colouring. No poet ever equalled Scott in the description of wild and simple scenes and the expression of wild and simple feelings. But I have said enough now of his poetry, in which, good as it is, Scott's genius did not reach its highest point. The hurried tramp of his somewhat monotonous metre, is apt to weary the ears of men who do not find their sufficient happiness, as he did, in dreaming of the wild and daring enterprises of his loved Border-land. The very quality in his verse which makes it seize so powerfully on the imaginations of plain, bold, adventurous men, often makes it hammer fatiguingly against the brain of those who need the relief of a wider horizon and a richer world.

## CHAPTER VI.

### COMPANIONS AND FRIENDS.

I HAVE anticipated in some degree, in speaking of Scott's later poetical works, what, in point of time at least, should follow some slight sketch of his chosen companions, and of his occupations in the first period of his married life. Scott's most intimate friend for some time after he went to college, probably the one who most stimulated his imagination in his youth, and certainly one of his most intimate friends to the very last, was William Clerk, who was called to the bar on the same day as Scott. He was the son of John Clerk of Eldin, the author of a book of some celebrity in its time on *Naval Tactics*. Even in the earliest days of this intimacy, the lads who had been Scott's fellow-apprentices in his father's office, saw with some jealousy his growing friendship with William Clerk, and remonstrated with Scott on the decline of his regard for them, but only succeeded in eliciting from him one of those outbursts of peremptory frankness which anything that he regarded as an attempt to encroach on his own interior liberty of choice always provoked. "I will never cut any man," he said, "unless I detect him in scoundrelism, but I know not what right any of you have to interfere with my choice of my company. As it is, I fairly own that though I like many of you very much, and

have long done so, I think William Clerk well worth you all put together."[1] Scott never lost the friendship which began with this eager enthusiasm, but his chief intimacy with Clerk was during his younger days.

In 1808 Scott describes Clerk as "a man of the most acute intellects and powerful apprehension, who, if he should ever shake loose the fetters of indolence by which he has been hitherto trammelled, cannot fail to be distinguished in the highest degree." Whether for the reason suggested, or for some other, Clerk never actually gained any other distinction so great as his friendship with Scott conferred upon him. Probably Scott had discerned the true secret of his friend's comparative obscurity. Even while preparing for the bar, when they had agreed to go on alternate mornings to each other's lodgings to read together, Scott found it necessary to modify the arrangement by always visiting his friend, whom he usually found in bed. It was William Clerk who sat for the picture of Darsie Latimer, the hero of *Redgauntlet*,— whence we should suppose him to have been a lively, generous, susceptible, contentious, and rather helter-skelter young man, much alive to the ludicrous in all situations, very eager to see life in all its phases, and somewhat vain of his power of adapting himself equally to all these phases. Scott tells a story of Clerk's being once baffled—almost for the first time—by a stranger in a stage coach, who would not, or could not, talk to him on any subject, until at last Clerk addressed to him this stately remonstrance, "I have talked to you, my friend, on all the ordinary subjects —literature, farming, merchandise, gaming, game-laws, horse-races, suits-at-law, politics, swindling, blasphemy,

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, i. 214.

and philosophy,—is there any one subject that you will favour me by opening upon?" "Sir," replied the inscrutable stranger, "can you say anything clever about '*bend-leather?*"[1] No doubt this superficial familiarity with a vast number of subjects was a great fascination to Scott, and a great stimulus to his own imagination. To the last he held the same opinion of his friend's latent powers. "To my thinking," he wrote in his diary in 1825, "I never met a man of greater powers, of more complete information on all desirable subjects." But in youth at least Clerk seems to have had what Sir Walter calls a characteristic Edinburgh complaint, the "itch for disputation," and though he softened this down in later life, he had always that slight contentiousness of bias which enthusiastic men do not often heartily like, and which may have prevented Scott from continuing to the full the close intimacy of those earlier years. Yet almost his last record of a really delightful evening, refers to a bachelor's dinner given by Mr. Clerk, who remained unmarried, as late as 1827, after all Sir Walter's worst troubles had come upon him. "In short," says the diary, "we really laughed, and real laughter is as rare as real tears. I must say, too, there was a *heart*, a kindly feeling prevailed over the party. Can London give such a dinner?"[2] It is clear then, that Clerk's charm for his friend survived to the last, and that it was not the mere inexperience of boyhood, which made Scott esteem him so highly in his early days.

If Clerk pricked, stimulated, and sometimes badgered Scott, another of his friends who became more and more intimate with him, as life went on, and who died before him, always

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, iii. 344.
[2] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, ix. 75.

soothed him, partly by his gentleness, partly by his almost feminine dependence. This was William Erskine, also a barrister, and son of an Episcopalian clergyman in Perthshire, —to whose influence it is probably due that Scott himself always read the English Church service in his own country house, and does not appear to have retained the Presbyterianism into which he was born. Erskine, who was afterwards raised to the Bench as Lord Kinnedder—a distinction which he did not survive for many months—was a good classic, a man of fine, or, as some of his companions thought, of almost superfine taste. The style apparently for which he had credit must have been a somewhat mimini-pimini style, if we may judge by Scott's attempt in *The Bridal of Triermain*, to write in a manner which he intended to be attributed to his friend. Erskine was left a widower in middle life, and Scott used to accuse him of philandering with pretty women,—a mode of love-making which Scott certainly contrived to render into verse, in painting Arthur's love-making to Lucy in that poem. It seems that some absolutely false accusation brought against Lord Kinnedder, of an intrigue with a lady with whom he had been thus philandering, broke poor Erskine's heart, during his first year as a Judge. "The Counsellor (as Scott always called him) was," says Mr. Lockhart, "a little man of feeble make, who seemed unhappy when his pony got beyond a footpace, and had never, I should suppose, addicted himself to any out of door's sports whatever. He would, I fancy, as soon have thought of slaying his own mutton as of handling a fowling-piece; he used to shudder when he saw a party equipped for coursing, as if murder was in the wind; but the cool, meditative angler was in his eyes the abomination of abominations. His small elegant features, hectic cheek

and soft hazel eyes, were the index of the quick, sensitive, gentle spirit within." "He would dismount to lead his horse down what his friend hardly perceived to be a descent at all; grew pale at a precipice; and, unlike the white lady of Avenel, would go a long way round for a bridge." He shrank from general society, and lived in closer intimacies, and his intimacy with Scott was of the closest. He was Scott's confidant in all literary matters, and his advice was oftener followed on questions of style and form, and of literary enterprise, than that of any other of Scott's friends. It is into Erskine's mouth that Scott puts the supposed exhortation to himself to choose more classical subjects for his poems:—

> "'Approach those masters o'er whose tomb
> Immortal laurels ever bloom;
> Instructive of the feebler bard,
> Still from the grave their voice is heard;
> From them, and from the paths they show'd,
> Choose honour'd guide and practised road;
> Nor ramble on through brake and maze,
> With harpers rude of barbarous days."

And it is to Erskine that Scott replies,—

> "For me, thus nurtured, dost thou ask
> The classic poet's well-conn'd task?
> Nay, Erskine, nay,—on the wild hill
> Let the wild heath-bell flourish still;
> Cherish the tulip, prune the vine,
> But freely let the woodbine twine,
> And leave untrimm'd the eglantine:
> Nay, my friend, nay,—since oft thy praise
> Hath given fresh vigour to my lays;
> Since oft thy judgment could refine
> My flatten'd thought or cumbrous line,
> Still kind, as is thy wont, attend,
> And in the minstrel spare the friend!"

It was Erskine, too, as Scott expressly states in his

introduction to the *Chronicles of the Canongate*, who reviewed with far too much partiality the *Tales of my Landlord*, in the *Quarterly Review*, for January, 1817,—a review unjustifiably included among Scott's own critical essays, on the very insufficient ground that the MS. reached Murray in Scott's own handwriting. There can, however, be no doubt at all that Scott copied out his friend's MS., in order to increase the mystification which he so much enjoyed as to the authorship of his variously named series of tales. Possibly enough, too, he may have drawn Erskine's attention to the evidence which justified his sketch of the Puritans in *Old Mortality*, evidence which he certainly intended at one time to embody in a reply of his own to the adverse criticism on that book. But though Erskine was Scott's *alter ego* for literary purposes, it is certain that Erskine, with his fastidious, not to say finical, sense of honour, would never have lent his name to cover a puff written by Scott of his own works. A man who, in Scott's own words, died "a victim to a hellishly false story, or rather, I should say, to the sensibility of his own nature, which could not endure even the shadow of reproach,—like the ermine, which is said to pine if its fur is soiled," was not the man to father a puff, even by his dearest friend, on that friend's own creations. Erskine was indeed almost feminine in his love of Scott; but he was feminine with all the irritable and scrupulous delicacy of a man who could not derogate from his own ideal of right, even to serve a friend.

Another friend of Scott's earlier days was John Leyden, Scott's most efficient coadjutor in the collection of the *Border Minstrelsy*,—that eccentric genius, marvellous linguist, and good-natured bear, who, bred a shepherd in one of the wildest valleys of Roxburghshire, had accumulated

before the age of nineteen an amount of learning which confounded the Edinburgh Professors, and who, without any previous knowledge of medicine, prepared himself to pass an examination for the medical profession, at six months' notice of the offer of an assistant-surgeoncy in the East India Company. It was Leyden who once walked between forty and fifty miles and back, for the sole purpose of visiting an old person who possessed a copy of a border ballad that was wanting for the *Minstrelsy*. Scott was sitting at dinner one day with company, when he heard a sound at a distance, "like that of the whistling of a tempest through the torn rigging of a vessel which scuds before it. The sounds increased as they approached more near; and Leyden (to the great astonishment of such of the guests as did not know him) burst into the room chanting the desiderated ballad with the most enthusiastic gesture, and all the energy of what he used to call the *saw-tones* of his voice."[1] Leyden's great antipathy was Ritson, an ill-conditioned antiquarian, of vegetarian principles, whom Scott alone of all the antiquarians of that day could manage to tame and tolerate. In Scott's absence one day, during his early married life at Lasswade, Mrs. Scott inadvertently offered Ritson a slice of beef, when that strange man burst out in such outrageous tones at what he chose to suppose an insult, that Leyden threatened to "thraw his neck" if he were not silent, a threat which frightened Ritson out of the cottage. On another occasion, simply in order to tease Ritson, Leyden complained that the meat was overdone, and sent to the kitchen for a plate of literally raw beef, and ate it up solely for the purpose of shocking his crazy rival in anti-

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, ii. 56.

quarian research. Poor Leyden did not long survive his experience of the Indian climate. And with him died a passion for knowledge of a very high order, combined with no inconsiderable poetical gifts. It was in the study of such eccentric beings as Leyden that Scott doubtless acquired his taste for painting the humours of Scotch character.

Another wild shepherd, and wilder genius among Scott's associates, not only in those earlier days, but to the end, was that famous Ettrick Shepherd, James Hogg, who was always quarrelling with his brother poet, as far as Scott permitted it, and making it up again when his better feelings returned. In a shepherd's dress, and with hands fresh from sheep-shearing, he came to dine for the first time with Scott in Castle Street, and finding Mrs. Scott lying on the sofa, immediately stretched himself at full length on another sofa; for, as he explained afterwards, "I thought I could not do better than to imitate the lady of the house." At dinner, as the wine passed, he advanced from "Mr. Scott," to "Shirra" (Sheriff), "Scott," "Walter," and finally "Wattie," till at supper he convulsed every one by addressing Mrs. Scott familiarly as "Charlotte."[1] Hogg wrote certain short poems, the beauty of which in their kind Sir Walter himself never approached; but he was a man almost without self-restraint or self-knowledge, though he had a great deal of self-importance, and hardly knew how much he owed to Scott's magnanimous and ever-forbearing kindness, or if he did, felt the weight of gratitude a burden on his heart. Very different was William Laidlaw, a farmer on the banks of the Yarrow, always Scott's friend, and afterwards his manager at Abbotsford, through

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, ii. 168-9.

whose hand he dictated many of his novels. Mr. Laidlaw was one of Scott's humbler friends,—a class of friends with whom he seems always to have felt more completely at his ease than any others—who gave at least as much as he received, one of those wise, loyal, and thoughtful men in a comparatively modest position of life, whom Scott delighted to trust, and never trusted without finding his trust justified. In addition to these Scotch friends, Scott had made, even before the publication of his *Border Minstrelsy*, not a few in London or its neighbourhood,—of whom the most important at this time was the grey-eyed, hatchet-faced, courteous George Ellis, as Leyden described him, the author of various works on ancient English poetry and romance, who combined with a shrewd, satirical vein, and a great knowledge of the world, political as well as literary, an exquisite taste in poetry, and a warm heart. Certainly Ellis's criticism on his poems was the truest and best that Scott ever received ; and had he lived to read his novels,—only one of which was published before Ellis's death,—he might have given Scott more useful help than either Ballantyne or even Erskine.

## CHAPTER VII.

### FIRST COUNTRY HOMES.

So completely was Scott by nature an out-of-doors man that he cannot be adequately known either through his poems or through his friends, without also knowing his external surroundings and occupations. His first country home was the cottage at Lasswade, on the Esk, about six miles from Edinburgh, which he took in 1798, a few months after his marriage, and retained till 1804. It was a pretty little cottage, in the beautification of which Scott felt great pride, and where he exercised himself in the small beginnings of those tastes for altering and planting which grew so rapidly upon him, and at last enticed him into castle-building and tree-culture on a dangerous, not to say, ruinous scale. One of Scott's intimate friends, the master of Rokeby, by whose house and neighbourhood the poem of that name was suggested, Mr. Morritt, walked along the Esk in 1808 with Scott four years after he had left it, and was taken out of his way to see it. "I have been bringing you," he said, "where there is little enough to be seen, only that Scotch cottage, but though not worth looking at, I could not pass it. It was our first country house when newly married, and many a contrivance it had to make it comfortable. I made a dining-table for it with my own hands. Look at these two miserable willow-trees

on either side the gate into the enclosure; they are tied together at the top to be an arch, and a cross made of two sticks over them is not yet decayed. To be sure it is not much of a lion to show a stranger; but I wanted to see it again myself, for I assure you that after I had constructed it, *mamma* (Mrs. Scott) and I both of us thought it so fine, we turned out to see it by moonlight, and walked backwards from it to the cottage-door, in admiration of our own magnificence and its picturesque effect." It was here at Lasswade that he bought the phaeton, which was the first wheeled carriage that ever penetrated to Liddesdale, a feat which it accomplished in the first August of this century.

When Scott left the cottage at Lasswade in 1804, it was to take up his country residence in Selkirkshire, of which he had now been made sheriff, in a beautiful little house belonging to his cousin, Major-General Sir James Russell, and known to all the readers of Scott's poetry as the Ashestiel of the *Marmion* introductions. The Glenkinnon brook dashes in a deep ravine through the grounds to join the Tweed; behind the house rise the hills which divide the Tweed from the Yarrow; and an easy ride took Scott into the scenery of the Yarrow. The description of Ashestiel, and the brook which runs through it, in the introduction to the first canto of *Marmion* is indeed one of the finest specimens of Scott's descriptive poetry:—

"November's sky is chill and drear,
November's leaf is red and sear;
Late, gazing down the steepy linn,
That hems our little garden in,
Low in its dark and narrow glen,
You scarce the rivulet might ken,
So thick the tangled greenwood grew,
So feeble trill'd the streamlet through;
Now, murmuring hoarse, and frequent seen,
Through bush and briar no longer green,

An angry brook, it sweeps the glade,
Brawls over rock and wild cascade,
And, foaming brown with doubled speed,
Hurries its waters to the Tweed."

Selkirk was his nearest town, and that was seven miles from Ashestiel; and even his nearest neighbour was at Yair, a few miles off lower down the Tweed,—Yair of which he wrote in another of the introductions to *Marmion*:—

"From Yair, which hills so closely bind
Scarce can the Tweed his passage find,
Though much he fret, and chafe, and toil,
Till all his eddying currents boil."

At Ashestiel it was one of his greatest delights to look after his relative's woods, and to dream of planting and thinning woods of his own, a dream only too amply realized. It was here that a new kitchen-range was sunk for some time in the ford, which was so swollen by a storm in 1805 that the horse and cart that brought it were themselves with difficulty rescued from the waters. And it was here that Scott first entered on that active life of literary labour in close conjunction with an equally active life of rural sport, which gained him a well-justified reputation as the hardest worker and the heartiest player in the kingdom. At Lasswade Scott's work had been done at night; but serious headaches made him change his habit at Ashestiel, and rise steadily at five, lighting his own fire in winter. "Arrayed in his shooting-jacket, or whatever dress he meant to use till dinner-time, he was seated at his desk by six o'clock, all his papers arranged before him in the most accurate order, and his books of reference marshalled around him on the floor, while at least one favourite dog lay watching his eye, just beyond the line

of circumvallation. Thus, by the time the family assembled for breakfast, between nine and ten, he had done enough, in his own language, 'to break the neck of the day's work.' After breakfast a couple of hours more were given to his solitary tasks, and by noon he was, as he used to say, his 'own man.' When the weather was bad, he would labour incessantly all the morning; but the general rule was to be out and on horseback by one o'clock at the latest; while, if any more distant excursion had been proposed overnight, he was ready to start on it by ten; his occasional rainy days of unintermitted study, forming, as he said, a fund in his favour, out of which he was entitled to draw for accommodation whenever the sun shone with special brightness." In his earlier days none of his horses liked to be fed except by their master. When Brown Adam was saddled, and the stable-door opened, the horse would trot round to the leaping-on stone of his own accord, to be mounted, and was quite intractable under any one but Scott. Scott's life might well be fairly divided—just as history is divided into reigns—by the succession of his horses and dogs. The reigns of Captain, Lieutenant, Brown Adam, Daisy, divide at least the period up to Waterloo; while the reigns of Sybil Grey, and the Covenanter, or Douce Davie, divide the period of Scott's declining years. During the brilliant period of the earlier novels we hear less of Scott's horses; but of his deerhounds there is an unbroken succession. Camp, Maida (the "Bevis" of *Woodstock*), and Nimrod, reigned successively between Sir Walter's marriage and his death. It was Camp on whose death he relinquished a dinner invitation previously accepted, on the ground that the death of "an old friend" rendered him unwilling to dine out; Maida to whom he erected a marble

monument, and Nimrod of whom he spoke so affectingly as too good a dog for his diminished fortunes during his absence in Italy on the last hopeless journey.

Scott's amusements at Ashestiel, besides riding, in which he was fearless to rashness, and coursing, which was the chief form of sporting in the neighbourhood, comprehended "burning the water," as salmon-spearing by torchlight was called, in the course of which he got many a ducking. Mr. Skene gives an amusing picture of their excursions together from Ashestiel among the hills, he himself followed by a lanky Savoyard, and Scott by a portly Scotch butler —both servants alike highly sensitive as to their personal dignity—on horses which neither of the attendants could sit well. "Scott's heavy lumbering buffetier had provided himself against the mountain storms with a huge cloak, which, when the cavalcade was at gallop, streamed at full stretch from his shoulders, and kept flapping in the other's face, who, having more than enough to do in preserving his own equilibrium, could not think of attempting at any time to control the pace of his steed, and had no relief but fuming and *pesting* at the *sacré manteau*, in language happily unintelligible to its wearer. Now and then some ditch or turf-fence rendered it indispensable to adventure on a leap, and no farce could have been more amusing than the display of politeness which then occurred between these worthy equestrians, each courteously declining in favour of his friend the honour of the first experiment, the horses fretting impatient beneath them, and the dogs clamouring encouragement."[1] Such was Scott's order of life at Ashestiel, where he remained from 1804 to 1812. As to his literary work here, it was enormous.

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, ii. 268-9.

Besides finishing *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, writing *Marmion*, *The Lady of the Lake*, part of *The Bridal of Triermain*, and part of *Rokeby*, and writing reviews, he wrote a *Life of Dryden*, and edited his works anew with some care, in eighteen volumes, edited *Somers's Collection of Tracts*, in thirteen volumes, quarto, *Sir Ralph Sadler's Life, Letters, and State Papers*, in three volumes, quarto, *Miss Seward's Life and Poetical Works*, *The Secret History of the Court of James I.*, in two volumes, *Strutt's Queenhoo Hall*, in four volumes, 12mo., and various other single volumes, and began his heavy work on the edition of Swift. This was the literary work of eight years, during which he had the duties of his Sheriffship, and, after he gave up his practice as a barrister, the duties of his Deputy Clerkship of Session to discharge regularly. The editing of Dryden alone would have seemed to most men of leisure a pretty full occupation for these eight years, and though I do not know that Scott edited with the anxious care with which that sort of work is often now prepared, that he went into all the arguments for a doubtful reading with the pains that Mr. Dyce spent on the various readings of Shakespeare, or that Mr. Spedding spent on a various reading of Bacon, yet Scott did his work in a steady, workmanlike manner, which satisfied the most fastidious critics of that day, and he was never, I believe, charged with hurrying or scamping it. His biographies of Swift and Dryden are plain solid pieces of work—not exactly the works of art which biographies have been made in our day—not comparable to Carlyle's studies of Cromwell or Frederick, or, in point of art, even to the life of John Sterling, but still sensible and interesting, sound in judgment, and animated in style.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### REMOVAL TO ABBOTSFORD, AND LIFE THERE.

In May, 1812, Scott having now at last obtained the salary of the Clerkship of Session, the work of which he had for more than five years discharged without pay, indulged himself in realizing his favourite dream of buying a "mountain farm" at Abbotsford,—five miles lower down the Tweed than his cottage at Ashestiel, which was now again claimed by the family of Russell,—and migrated thither with his household gods. The children long remembered the leave-taking as one of pure grief, for the villagers were much attached both to Scott and to his wife, who had made herself greatly beloved by her untiring goodness to the sick among her poor neighbours. But Scott himself describes the migration as a scene in which their neighbours found no small share of amusement. "Our flitting and removal from Ashestiel baffled all description; we had twenty-five cartloads of the veriest trash in nature, besides dogs, pigs, ponies, poultry, cows, calves, bare-headed wenches, and bare-breeched boys."[1]

To another friend Scott wrote that the neighbours had "been much delighted with the procession of my furniture, in which old swords, bows, targets, and lances, made a very conspicuous show. A family of turkeys was

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, iv. 6.

accommodated within the helmet of some *preux chevalier* of ancient border fame; and the very cows, for aught I know, were bearing banners and muskets. I assure your ladyship that this caravan attended by a dozen of ragged rosy peasant children, carrying fishing-rods and spears, and leading ponies, greyhounds, and spaniels, would, as it crossed the Tweed, have furnished no bad subject for the pencil, and really reminded me of one of the gipsy groups of Callot upon their march." [1]

The place thus bought for 4000*l.*,—half of which, according to Scott's bad and sanguine habit, was borrowed from his brother, and half raised on the security of a poem at the moment of sale wholly unwritten, and not completed even when he removed to Abbotsford—"Rokeby"—became only too much of an idol for the rest of Scott's life. Mr. Lockhart admits that before the crash came he had invested 29,000*l.* in the purchase of land alone. But at this time only the kernel of the subsequent estate was bought, in the shape of a hundred acres or rather more, part of which ran along the shores of the Tweed—"a beautiful river flowing broad and bright over a bed of milk-white pebbles, unless here and there where it darkened into a deep pool, overhung as yet only by birches and alders." There was also a poor farm-house, a staring barn, and a pond so dirty that it had hitherto given the name of "Clarty Hole" to the place itself. Scott renamed the place from the adjoining ford which was just above the confluence of the Gala with the Tweed. He chose the name of Abbotsford because the land had formerly all belonged to the Abbots of Melrose,—the ruin of whose beautiful abbey was visible from many parts of the little

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, iv. 3.

property. On the other side of the river the old British barrier called "the Catrail" was full in view. As yet the place was not planted,—the only effort made in this direction by its former owner, Dr. Douglas, having been a long narrow stripe of firs, which Scott used to compare to a black hair-comb, and which gave the name of "The Doctor's Redding-Kame" to the stretch of woods of which it is still the central line. Such was the place which he made it the too great delight of the remainder of his life to increase and beautify, by spending on it a good deal more than he had earned, and that too in times when he should have earned a good deal more than he ought to have thought even for a moment of spending. The cottage grew to a mansion, and the mansion to a castle. The farm by the Tweed made him long for a farm by the Cauldshiel's loch, and the farm by the Cauldshiel's loch for Thomas the Rhymer's Glen; and as, at every step in the ladder, his means of buying were really increasing—though they were so cruelly discounted and forestalled by this growing land-hunger,—Scott never realized into what troubles he was carefully running himself.

Of his life at Abbotsford at a later period when his building was greatly enlarged, and his children grown up, we have a brilliant picture from the pen of Mr. Lockhart. And though it does not belong to his first years at Abbotsford, I cannot do better than include it here as conveying probably better than anything I could elsewhere find, the charm of that ideal life which lured Scott on from one project to another in that scheme of castle-building, in relation to which he confused so dangerously the world of dreams with the harder world of wages, capital, interest, and rent.

"I remember saying to William Allan one morning, as the whole party mustered before the porch after breakfast, 'A faithful sketch of what you at this moment see would be more interesting a hundred years hence than the grandest so-called historical picture that you will ever exhibit in Somerset House;' and my friend agreed with me so cordially that I often wondered afterwards he had not attempted to realize the suggestion. The subject ought, however, to have been treated conjointly by him (or Wilkie) and Edwin Landseer.

"It was a clear, bright September morning, with a sharpness in the air that doubled the animating influence of the sunshine, and all was in readiness for a grand coursing match on Newark Hill. The only guest who had chalked out other sport for himself was the staunchest of anglers, Mr. Rose: but he too was there on his *shelty*, armed with his salmon-rod and landing-net, and attended by his humorous squire, Hinves, and Charlie Purdie, a brother of Tom, in those days the most celebrated fisherman of the district. This little group of Waltonians, bound for Lord Somerville's preserve, remained lounging about to witness the start of the main cavalcade. Sir Walter, mounted on Sybil, was marshalling the order of procession with a huge hunting-whip; and among a dozen frolicsome youths and maidens, who seemed disposed to laugh at all discipline, appeared, each on horseback, each as eager as the youngest sportsman in the troop, Sir Humphry Davy, Dr. Wollaston, and the patriarch of Scottish *belles lettres*, Henry Mackenzie. The Man of Feeling, however, was persuaded with some difficulty to resign his steed for the present to his faithful negro follower, and to join Lady Scott in the sociable, until we should reach the ground of our *battue*. Laidlaw, on a long-tailed, wiry Highlander, yclept Hoddin Grey, which carried him nimbly and stoutly, although his feet almost touched the ground as he sat, was the adjutant. But the most picturesque figure was the illustrious inventor of the safety-lamp. He had come for his favourite sport of angling, and had been practising it successfully with Rose, his travelling-companion, for two or three days preceding this, but he had not prepared for coursing fields, and had left Charlie Purdie's

troop for Sir Walter's on a sudden thought; and his fisherman's costume—a brown hat with flexible brim, surrounded with line upon line, and innumerable fly-hooks, jack-boots worthy of a Dutch smuggler, and a fustian surtout dabbled with the blood of salmon,—made a fine contrast with the smart jackets, white cord breeches, and well-polished jockey-boots of the less distinguished cavaliers about him. Dr. Wollaston was in black, and, with his noble, serene dignity of countenance, might have passed for a sporting archbishop. Mr. Mackenzie, at this time in the seventy-sixth year of his age, with a white hat turned up with green, green spectacles, green jacket, and long brown leather gaiters buttoned upon his nether anatomy, wore a dog-whistle round his neck, and had all over the air of as resolute a devotee as the gay captain of Huntly Burn. Tom Purdie and his subalterns had preceded us by a few hours with all the greyhounds that could be collected at Abbotsford, Darnick, and Melrose; but the giant Maida had remained as his master's orderly, and now gambolled about Sibyl Grey, barking for mere joy, like a spaniel puppy.

"The order of march had been all settled, and the sociable was just getting under weigh, when *the Lady Anne* broke from the line, screaming with laughter, and exclaimed, 'Papa! papa! I know you could never think of going without your pet.' Scott looked round, and I rather think there was a blush as well as a smile upon his face, when he perceived a little black *pig* frisking about his pony, and evidently a self-elected addition to the party of the day. He tried to look stern, and cracked his whip at the creature, but was in a moment obliged to join in the general cheers. Poor piggy soon found a strap round his neck, and was dragged into the background. Scott, watching the retreat, repeated with mock pathos the first verse of an old pastoral song:—

> "What will I do gin my hoggie die?
> My joy, my pride, my hoggie!
> My only beast, I had nae mae,
> And wow! but I was vogie!"

The cheers were redoubled, and the squadron moved on. This pig had taken, nobody could tell how, a most sentimental attachment to Scott, and was constantly urging its pretension to be admitted a regular member of his *tail*, along with the greyhounds and terriers; but indeed I remember him suffering another summer under the same sort of pertinacity on the part of an affectionate hen. I leave the explanation for philosophers; but such were the facts. I have too much respect for the vulgarly calumniated donkey to name him in the same category of pets with the pig and the hen; but a year or two after this time, my wife used to drive a couple of these animals in a little garden chair, and whenever her father appeared at the door of our cottage, we were sure to see Hannah More and Lady Morgan (as Anne Scott had wickedly christened them) trotting from their pasture to lay their noses over the paling, and, as Washington Irving says of the old white-haired hedger with the Parisian snuff-box, 'to have a pleasant crack wi' the laird.'"[1]

Carlyle, in his criticism on Scott—a criticism which will hardly, I think, stand the test of criticism in its turn, so greatly does he overdo the reaction against the first excessive appreciation of his genius—adds a contribution of his own to this charming idyll, in reference to the natural fascination which Scott seemed to exert over almost all dumb creatures. A little Blenheim cocker, "one of the smallest, beautifullest, and tiniest of lapdogs," with which Carlyle was well acquainted, and which was also one of the shyest of dogs, that would crouch towards his mistress and draw back "with angry timidity" if any one did but look at him admiringly, once met in the street "a tall, singular, busy-looking man," who halted by. The dog ran towards him and began "fawning, frisking, licking at his feet;" and every time he saw Sir Walter

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, vi. 238—242.

afterwards, in Edinburgh, he repeated his demonstration of delight. Thus discriminating was this fastidious Blenheim cocker even in the busy streets of Edinburgh.

And Scott's attraction for dumb animals was only a lesser form of his attraction for all who were in any way dependent on him, especially his own servants and labourers. The story of his demeanour towards them is one of the most touching ever written. "Sir Walter speaks to every man as if they were blood-relations" was the common *formula* in which this demeanour was described. Take this illustration. There was a little hunchbacked tailor, named William Goodfellow, living on his property (but who at Abbotsford was termed Robin Goodfellow). This tailor was employed to make the curtains for the new library, and had been very proud of his work, but fell ill soon afterwards, and Sir Walter was unremitting in his attention to him. "I can never forget," says Mr. Lockhart, "the evening on which the poor tailor died. When Scott entered the hovel, he found everything silent, and inferred from the looks of the good women in attendance that the patient had fallen asleep, and that they feared his sleep was the final one. He murmured some syllables of kind regret: at the sound of his voice the dying tailor unclosed his eyes, and eagerly and wistfully sat up, clasping his hands with an expression of rapturous gratefulness and devotion that, in the midst of deformity, disease, pain, and wretchedness, was at once beautiful and sublime. He cried with a loud voice, 'The Lord bless and reward you!' and expired with the effort."[1] Still more striking is the account of his relation with Tom Purdie, the wide-

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, vii. 218.

mouthed, under-sized, broad-shouldered, square-made, thin-flanked woodsman, so well known afterwards by all Scott's friends as he waited for his master in his green shooting-jacket, white hat, and drab trousers. Scott first made Tom Purdie's acquaintance in his capacity as judge, the man being brought before him for poaching, at the time that Scott was living at Ashestiel. Tom gave so touching an account of his circumstances—work scarce—wife and children in want—grouse abundant—and his account of himself was so fresh and even humorous, that Scott let him off the penalty, and made him his shepherd. He discharged these duties so faithfully that he came to be his master's forester and factotum, and indeed one of his best friends, though a little disposed to tyrannize over Scott in his own fashion. A visitor describes him as unpacking a box of new importations for his master "as if he had been sorting some toys for a restless child." But after Sir Walter had lost the bodily strength requisite for riding, and was too melancholy for ordinary conversation, Tom Purdie's shoulder was his great stay in wandering through his woods, for with him he felt that he might either speak or be silent at his pleasure. "What a blessing there is," Scott wrote in his diary at that time, "in a fellow like Tom, whom no familiarity can spoil, whom you may scold and praise and joke with, knowing the quality of the man is unalterable in his love and reverence to his master." After Scott's failure, Mr. Lockhart writes: "Before I leave this period, I must note how greatly I admired the manner in which all his dependents appeared to have met the reverse of his fortunes—a reverse which inferred very considerable alteration in the circumstances of every one of them. The butler, instead of being the easy chief of a large establishment,

was now doing half the work of the house at probably half his former wages. Old Peter, who had been for five and twenty years a dignified coachman, was now ploughman in ordinary, only putting his horses to the carriage upon high and rare occasions; and so on with all the rest that remained of the ancient train. And all, to my view, seemed happier than they had ever done before."[1] The illustration of this true confidence between Scott and his servants and labourers might be extended to almost any length.

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, ix. 170.

## CHAPTER IX.

### SCOTT'S PARTNERSHIPS WITH THE BALLANTYNES.

BEFORE I make mention of Scott's greatest works, his novels, I must say a few words of his relation to the Ballantyne Brothers, who involved him, and were involved by him, in so many troubles, and with whose name the story of his broken fortunes is inextricably bound up. James Ballantyne, the elder brother, was a schoolfellow of Scott's at Kelso, and was the editor and manager of the *Kelso Mail*, an anti-democratic journal, which had a fair circulation. Ballantyne was something of an artist as regarded "type," and Scott got him therefore to print his *Minstrelsy of the Border*, the excellent workmanship of which attracted much attention in London. In 1802, on Scott's suggestion, Ballantyne moved to Edinburgh; and to help him to move, Scott, who was already meditating some investment of his little capital in business other than literary, lent him 500*l*. Between this and 1805, when Scott first became a partner of Ballantyne's in the printing business, he used every exertion to get legal and literary printing offered to James Ballantyne, and, according to Mr. Lockhart, the concern "grew and prospered." At Whitsuntide, 1805, when *The Lay* had been published, but before Scott had the least idea of the prospects of gain which mere lite-

rature would open to him, he formally, though secretly, joined Ballantyne as a partner in the printing business. He explains his motives for this step, so far at least as he then recalled them, in a letter written after his misfortunes, in 1826. "It is easy," he said, "no doubt for any friend to blame me for entering into connexion with commercial matters at all. But I wish to know what I could have done better—excluded from the bar, and then from all profits for six years, by my colleague's prolonged life. Literature was not in those days what poor Constable has made it; and with my little capital I was too glad to make commercially the means of supporting my family. I got but 600*l.* for *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, and—it was a price that made men's hair stand on end—1000*l.* for *Marmion*. I have been far from suffering by James Ballantyne. I owe it to him to say, that his difficulties, as well as his advantages, are owing to me."

This, though a true, was probably a very imperfect account of Scott's motives. He ceased practising at the bar, I do not doubt, in great degree from a kind of hurt pride at his ill-success, at a time when he felt during every month more and more confidence in his own powers. He believed, with some justice, that he understood some of the secrets of popularity in literature, but he had always, till towards the end of his life, the greatest horror of resting on literature alone as his main resource; and he was not a man, nor was Lady Scott a woman, to pinch and live narrowly. Were it only for his lavish generosity, that kind of life would have been intolerable to him. Hence, he reflected, that if he could but use his literary instinct to feed some commercial undertaking, managed by a man he could trust, he might gain a considerable percentage on his little capital, without so embarking in commerce

as to oblige him either to give up his status as a sheriff, or his official duties as a clerk of session, or his literary undertakings. In his old schoolfellow, James Ballantyne, he believed he had found just such an agent as he wanted, the requisite link between literary genius like his own, and the world which reads and buys books; and he thought that, by feeling his way a little, he might secure, through this partnership, besides the then very bare rewards of authorship, at least a share in those more liberal rewards which commercial men managed to squeeze for themselves out of successful authors. And, further, he felt—and this was probably the greatest unconscious attraction for him in this scheme—that with James Ballantyne for his partner he should be the real leader and chief, and rather in the position of a patron and benefactor of his colleague, than of one in any degree dependent on the generosity or approval of others. "If I have a very strong passion in the world," he once wrote of himself—and the whole story of his life seems to confirm it—"it is pride."[1] In James Ballantyne he had a faithful, but almost humble friend, with whom he could deal much as he chose, and fear no wound to his pride. He had himself helped Ballantyne to a higher line of business than any hitherto aspired to by him. It was his own book which first got the Ballantyne press its public credit. And if he could but create a great commercial success upon this foundation, he felt that he should be fairly entitled to share in the gains, which not merely his loan of capital, but his foresight and courage had opened to Ballantyne.

And it is quite possible that Scott might have succeeded—or at all events not seriously failed—if he had

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, viii. 221.

been content to stick to the printing firm of James Ballantyne and Co., and had not launched also into the bookselling and publishing firm of John Ballantyne and Co., or had never begun the wild and dangerous practice of forestalling his gains, and spending wealth which he had not earned. But when by way of feeding the printing press of James Ballantyne and Co., he started in 1809 the bookselling and publishing firm of John Ballantyne and Co., using as his agent a man as inferior in sterling worth to James, as James was inferior in general ability to himself, he carefully dug a mine under his own feet, of which we can only say, that nothing except his genius could have prevented it from exploding long before it did. The truth was evidently that James Ballantyne's respectful homage, and John's humorous appreciation, all but blinded Scott's eyes to the utter inadequacy of either of these men, especially the latter, to supply the deficiencies of his own character for conducting business of this kind with proper discretion. James Ballantyne, who was pompous and indolent, though thoroughly honest, and not without some intellectual insight, Scott used to call Aldiborontiphoscophornio. John, who was clever but frivolous, dissipated, and tricksy, he termed Rigdumfunnidos, or his "little Picaroon." It is clear from Mr. Lockhart's account of the latter that Scott not only did not respect, but despised him, though he cordially liked him, and that he passed over, in judging him, vices which in a brother or son of his own he would severely have rebuked. I believe myself that his liking for co-operation with both, was greatly founded on his feeling that they were simply creatures of his, to whom he could pretty well dictate what he wanted,—colleagues whose inferiority to himself unconsciously flattered his pride.

He was evidently inclined to resent bitterly the patronage of publishers. He sent word to Blackwood once with great hauteur, after some suggestion from that house had been made to him which appeared to him to interfere with his independence as an author, that he was one of "the Black Hussars" of literature, who would not endure that sort of treatment. Constable, who was really very liberal, hurt his sensitive pride through the *Edinburgh Review*, of which Jeffrey was editor. Thus the Ballantynes' great deficiency—that neither of them had any independent capacity for the publishing business, which would in any way hamper his discretion—though this is just what commercial partners ought to have had, or they were not worth their salt,—was, I believe, precisely what induced this Black Hussar of literature, in spite of his otherwise considerable sagacity and knowledge of human nature, to select them for partners.

And yet it is strange that he not only chose them, but chose the inferior and lighter-headed of the two for far the most important and difficult of the two businesses. In the printing concern there was at least this to be said, that of part of the business—the selection of type and the superintendence of the executive part,—James Ballantyne was a good judge. He was never apparently a good man of business, for he kept no strong hand over the expenditure and accounts, which is the core of success in every concern. But he understood types; and his customers were publishers, a wealthy and judicious class, who were not likely all to fail together. But to select a "Rigdumfunnidos,"—a dissipated comic-song singer and horse-fancier,—for the head of a publishing concern, was indeed a kind of insanity. It is told of John Ballantyne, that after the successful negotiation with Constable for

*Rob Roy*, and while "hopping up and down in his glee," he exclaimed, "'Is Rob's gun here, Mr. Scott? Would you object to my trying the old barrel with a *few de joy?*' 'Nay, Mr. Puff,' said Scott, 'it would burst and blow you to the devil before your time.' 'Johnny, my man,' said Constable, 'what the mischief puts drawing at sight into *your* head?' Scott laughed heartily at this innuendo; and then observing that the little man felt somewhat sore, called attention to the notes of a bird in the adjoining shrubbery. 'And by-the-bye,' said he, as they continued listening, ''tis a long time, Johnny, since we have had "The Cobbler of Kelso."' Mr. Puff forthwith jumped up on a mass of stone, and seating himself in the proper attitude of one working with an awl, began a favourite interlude, mimicking a certain son of Crispin, at whose stall Scott and he had often lingered when they were schoolboys, and a blackbird, the only companion of his cell, that used to sing to him while he talked and whistled to it all day long. With this performance Scott was always delighted. Nothing could be richer than the contrast of the bird's wild, sweet notes, some of which he imitated with wonderful skill, and the accompaniment of the cobbler's hoarse, cracked voice, uttering all manner of endearing epithets, which Johnny multiplied and varied in a style worthy of the old women in Rabelais at the birth of Pantagruel."[1] That passage gives precisely the kind of estimation in which John Ballantyne was held both by Scott and Constable. And yet it was to him that Scott entrusted the dangerous and difficult duty of setting up a new publishing house as a rival to the best publishers of the day. No doubt Scott really

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, v. 218.

relied on his own judgment for working the publishing house. But except where his own books were concerned, no judgment could have been worse. In the first place he was always wanting to do literary jobs for a friend, and so advised the publishing of all sorts of unsaleable books, because his friends desired to write them. In the next place, he was a genuine historian, and one of the antiquarian kind himself; he was himself really interested in all sorts of historical and antiquarian issues,—and very mistakenly gave the public credit for wishing to know what he himself wished to know. I should add that Scott's good nature and kindness of heart not only led him to help on many books which he knew in himself could never answer, and some which, as he well knew, would be altogether worthless, but that it greatly biassed his own intellectual judgment. Nothing can be plainer than that he really held his intimate friend, Joanna Baillie, a very great dramatic poet, a much greater poet than himself, for instance; one fit to be even mentioned as following—at a distance—in the track of Shakespeare. He supposes Erskine to exhort him thus :—

> "Or, if to touch such chord be thine,
> Restore the ancient tragic line,
> And emulate the notes that rung
> From the wild harp which silent hung
> By silver Avon's holy shore,
> Till twice a hundred years roll'd o'er,—
> When she, the bold enchantress, came
> With fearless hand and heart on flame,
> From the pale willow snatch'd the treasure,
> And swept it with a kindred measure,
> Till Avon's swans, while rung the grove
> With Montfort's hate and Basil's love,
> Awakening at the inspired strain,
> Deem'd their own Shakespeare lived again."

Avon's swans must have been Avon's geese, I think, if they had deemed anything of the kind. Joanna Baillie's dramas are "nice," and rather dull; now and then she can write a song with the ease and sweetness that suggest Shakespearian echoes. But Scott's judgment was obviously blinded by his just and warm regard for Joanna Baillie herself.

Of course with such interfering causes to bring unsaleable books to the house—of course I do not mean that John Ballantyne and Co. published for Joanna Baillie, or that they would have lost by it if they had—the new firm published all sorts of books which did not sell at all; while John Ballantyne himself indulged in a great many expenses and dissipations, for which John Ballantyne and Co. had to pay. Nor was it very easy for a partner who himself drew bills on the future—even though he were the well-spring of all the paying business the company had—to be very severe on a fellow-partner who supplied his pecuniary needs in the same way. At all events, there is no question that all through 1813 and 1814 Scott was kept in constant suspense and fear of bankruptcy, by the ill-success of John Ballantyne and Co., and the utter want of straightforwardness in John Ballantyne himself as to the bills out, and which had to be provided against. It was the publication of *Waverley*, and the consequent opening up of the richest vein not only in Scott's own genius, but in his popularity with the public, which alone ended these alarms; and the many unsaleable works of John Ballantyne and Co. were then gradually disposed of to Constable and others, to their own great loss, as part of the conditions on which they received a share in the copyright of the wonderful novels which sold like wildfire. But though in this way

the publishing business of John Ballantyne and Co. was saved, and its affairs pretty decently wound up, the printing firm remained saddled with some of their obligations; while Constable's business, on which Scott depended for the means with which he was buying his estate, building his castle, and settling money on his daughter-in-law, was seriously injured by the purchase of all this unsaleable stock.

I do not think that any one who looks into the complicated controversy between the representatives of the Ballantynes and Mr. Lockhart, concerning these matters, can be content with Mr. Lockhart's—no doubt perfectly sincere—judgment on the case. It is obvious that amidst these intricate accounts, he fell into one or two serious blunders—blunders very unjust to James Ballantyne. And without pretending to have myself formed any minute judgment on the details, I think the following points clear:—(1.) That James Ballantyne was very severely judged by Mr. Lockhart, on grounds which were never alleged by Scott against him at all,—indeed on grounds on which he was expressly exempted from all blame by Sir Walter. (2.) That Sir Walter Scott was very severely judged by the representatives of the Ballantynes, on grounds on which James Ballantyne himself never brought any charge against him; on the contrary, he declared that he had no charge to bring. (3.) That both Scott and his partners invited ruin by freely spending gains which they only expected to earn, and that in this Scott certainly set an example which he could hardly expect feebler men not to follow. On the whole, I think the troubles with the Ballantyne brothers brought to light not only that eager gambling spirit in him, which his grandfather indulged with better success and more moderation when he bought

the hunter with money destined for a flock of sheep, and then gave up gambling for ever, but a tendency still more dangerous, and in some respects involving an even greater moral defect,—I mean a tendency, chiefly due, I think, to a very deep-seated pride,—to prefer inferior men as working colleagues in business. And yet it is clear that if Scott were to dabble in publishing at all, he really needed the check of men of larger experience, and less literary turn of mind. The great majority of consumers of popular literature are not, and indeed will hardly ever be, literary men; and that is precisely why a publisher who is not, in the main, literary,—who looks on authors' MSS. for the most part with distrust and suspicion, much as a rich man looks at a begging-letter, or a sober and judicious fish at an angler's fly,—is so much less likely to run aground than such a man as Scott. The untried author should be regarded by a wise publisher as a natural enemy,—an enemy indeed of a class, rare specimens whereof will always be his best friends, and who, therefore, should not be needlessly affronted—but also as one of a class of whom nineteen out of every twenty will dangle before the publisher's eyes wiles and hopes and expectations of the most dangerous and illusory character, -which constitute indeed the very perils that it is his true function in life skilfully to evade. The Ballantynes were quite unfit for this function; first, they had not the experience requisite for it; next, they were altogether too much under Scott's influence. No wonder that the partnership came to no good, and left behind it the germs of calamity even more serious still.

## CHAPTER X.

### THE WAVERLEY NOVELS.

In the summer of 1814, Scott took up again and completed—almost at a single heat,—a fragment of a Jacobite story, begun in 1805 and then laid aside. It was published anonymously, and its astonishing success turned back again the scales of Scott's fortunes, already inclining ominously towards a catastrophe. This story was *Waverley.* Mr. Carlyle has praised *Waverley* above its fellows. "On the whole, contrasting *Waverley*, which was carefully written, with most of its followers which were written extempore, one may regret the extempore method." This is, however, a very unfortunate judgment. Not one of the whole series of novels appears to have been written more completely extempore than the great bulk of *Waverley,* including almost everything that made it either popular with the million or fascinating to the fastidious; and it is even likely that this is one of the causes of its excellence.

"The last two volumes," says Scott, in a letter to Mr. Morritt, "were written in three weeks." And here is Mr. Lockhart's description of the effect which Scott's incessant toil during the composition, produced on a friend whose window happened to command the novelist's study:—

"Happening to pass through Edinburgh in June, 1814, I dined one day with the gentleman in question (now the Honourable William Menzies, one of the Supreme Judges at the Cape of Good Hope), whose residence was then in George Street, situated very near to, and at right angles with, North Castle Street. It was a party of very young persons, most of them, like Menzies and myself, destined for the Bar of Scotland, all gay and thoughtless, enjoying the first flush of manhood, with little remembrance of the yesterday, or care of the morrow. When my companion's worthy father and uncle, after seeing two or three bottles go round, left the juveniles to themselves, the weather being hot, we adjourned to a library which had one large window looking northwards. After carousing here for an hour or more, I observed that a shade had come over the aspect of my friend, who happened to be placed immediately opposite to myself, and said something that intimated a fear of his being unwell. 'No,' said he, 'I shall be well enough presently, if you will only let me sit where you are, and take my chair; for there is a confounded hand in sight of me here, which has often bothered me before, and now it won't let me fill my glass with a good will.' I rose to change places with him accordingly, and he pointed out to me this hand, which, like the writing on Belshazzar's wall, disturbed his hour of hilarity. 'Since we sat down,' he said, 'I have been watching it—it fascinates my eye—it never stops—page after page is finished, and thrown on that heap of MS., and still it goes on unwearied; and so it will be till candles are brought in, and God knows how long after that. It is the same every night—I can't stand a sight of it when I am not at my books.' 'Some stupid, dogged engrossing clerk, probably,' exclaimed myself, 'or some other giddy youth in our society.' 'No, boys,' said our host; 'I well know what hand it is—'tis Walter Scott's.'"[1]

If that is not extempore writing, it is difficult to say what extempore writing is. But in truth there is no

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, iv. 171-3.

evidence that any one of the novels was laboured, or even so much as carefully composed. Scott's method of composition was always the same; and, when writing an imaginative work, the rate of progress seems to have been pretty even, depending much more on the absence of disturbing engagements, than on any mental irregularity. The morning was always his brightest time; but morning or evening, in country or in town, well or ill, writing with his own pen or dictating to an amanuensis in the intervals of screaming-fits due to the torture of cramp in the stomach, Scott spun away at his imaginative web almost as evenly as a silkworm spins at its golden cocoon. Nor can I detect the slightest trace of any difference in quality between the stories, such as can be reasonably ascribed to comparative care or haste. There are differences, and even great differences, of course, ascribable to the less or greater suitability of the subject chosen to Scott's genius, but I can find no trace of the sort of cause to which Mr. Carlyle refers. Thus, few, I suppose, would hesitate to say that while *Old Mortality* is very near, if not quite, the finest of Scott's works, *The Black Dwarf* is not far from the other end of the scale. Yet the two were written in immediate succession (*The Black Dwarf* being the first of the two), and were published together, as the first series of *Tales of my Landlord*, in 1816. Nor do I think that any competent critic would find any clear deterioration of quality in the novels of the later years,—excepting of course the two written after the stroke of paralysis. It is true, of course, that some of the subjects which most powerfully stirred his imagination were among his earlier themes, and that he could not effectually use the same subject twice, though he now and then tried it. But making allowance

for this consideration, the imaginative power of the novels is as astonishingly *even* as the rate of composition itself. For my own part, I greatly prefer *The Fortunes of Nigel* (which was written in 1822) to *Waverley* which was begun in 1805, and finished in 1814, and though very many better critics would probably decidedly disagree, I do not think that any of them would consider this preference grotesque or purely capricious. Indeed, though *Anne of Geierstein*,—the last composed before Scott's stroke,—would hardly seem to any careful judge the equal of *Waverley*, I do not much doubt that if it had appeared in place of *Waverley*, it would have excited very nearly as much interest and admiration; nor that had *Waverley* appeared in 1829, in place of *Anne of Geierstein*, it would have failed to excite very much more. In these fourteen most effective years of Scott's literary life, during which he wrote twenty-three novels besides shorter tales, the best stories appear to have been on the whole the most rapidly written, probably because they took the strongest hold of the author's imagination.

Till near the close of his career as an author, Scott never avowed his responsibility for any of these series of novels, and even took some pains to mystify the public as to the identity between the author of *Waverley* and the author of *Tales of my Landlord*. The care with which the secret was kept is imputed by Mr. Lockhart in some degree to the habit of mystery which had grown upon Scott during his secret partnership with the Ballantynes; but in this he seems to be confounding two very different phases of Scott's character. No doubt he was, as a professional man, a little ashamed of his commercial speculation, and unwilling to betray it. But he was far from ashamed of his literary enterprise, though it seems

that he was at first very anxious lest a comparative failure, or even a mere moderate success, in a less ambitious sphere than that of poetry, should endanger the great reputation he had gained as a poet. That was apparently the first reason for secrecy. But, over and above this, it is clear that the mystery stimulated Scott's imagination and saved him trouble as well. He was obviously more free under the veil—free from the liability of having to answer for the views of life or history suggested in his stories; but besides this, what was of more importance to him, the slight disguise stimulated his sense of humour, and gratified the whimsical, boyish pleasure which he always had in acting an imaginary character. He used to talk of himself as a sort of Abon Hassan—a private man one day, and acting the part of a monarch the next—with the kind of glee which indicated a real delight in the change of parts, and I have little doubt that he threw himself with the more gusto into characters very different from his own, in consequence of the pleasure it gave him to conceive his friends hopelessly misled by this display of traits, with which he supposed that they could not have credited him even in imagination. Thus besides relieving him of a host of compliments which he did not enjoy, and enabling him the better to evade an ill-bred curiosity, the disguise no doubt was the same sort of fillip to the fancy which a mask and domino or a fancy dress are to that of their wearers. Even in a disguise a man cannot cease to be himself; but he can get rid of his improperly "imputed" righteousness—often the greatest burden he has to bear—and of all the expectations formed on the strength, as Mr. Clough says,—

"Of having been what one has been,
What one thinks one is, or thinks that others suppose one."

To some men the freedom of this disguise is a real danger and temptation. It never could have been so to Scott, who was in the main one of the simplest as well as the boldest and proudest of men. And as most men perhaps would admit that a good deal of even the best part of their nature is rather suppressed than expressed by the name by which they are known in the world, Scott must have felt this in a far higher degree, and probably regarded the manifold characters under which he was known to society, as representing him in some respects more justly than any individual name could have done. His mind ranged hither and thither over a wide field—far beyond that of his actual experience,—and probably ranged over it all the more easily for not being absolutely tethered to a single class of associations by any public confession of his authorship. After all, when it became universally known that Scott was the only author of all these tales, it may be doubted whether the public thought as adequately of the imaginative efforts which had created them, as they did while they remained in some doubt whether there was a multiplicity of agencies at work, or only one. The uncertainty helped them to realize the many lives which were really led by the author of all these tales, more completely than any confession of the individual authorship could have done. The shrinking of activity in public curiosity and wonder which follows the final determination of such ambiguities, is very apt to result rather in a dwindling of the imaginative effort to enter into the genius which gave rise to them, than in an increase of respect for so manifold a creative power.

When Scott wrote, such fertility as his in the production of novels was regarded with amazement approaching to absolute incredulity. Yet he was in this respect only

the advanced-guard of a not inconsiderable class of men and women who have a special gift for pouring out story after story, containing a great variety of figures, while retaining a certain even level of merit. There is more than one novelist of the present day who has far surpassed Scott in the number of his tales, and one at least of very high repute, who has, I believe, produced more even within the same time. But though to our larger experience, Scott's achievement, in respect of mere fertility, is by no means the miracle which it once seemed, I do not think one of his successors can compare with him for a moment in the ease and truth with which he painted, not merely the life of his own time and country—seldom indeed that of precisely his own time—but that of days long past, and often too of scenes far distant. The most powerful of all his stories, *Old Mortality*, was the story of a period more than a century and a quarter before he wrote; and others,—which though inferior to this in force, are nevertheless, when compared with the so-called historical romances of any other English writer, what sunlight is to moonlight, if you can say as much for the latter as to admit even that comparison,—go back to the period of the Tudors, that is, two centuries and a half. *Quentin Durward*, which is all but amongst the best, runs back farther still, far into the previous century, while *Ivanhoe* and *The Talisman*, though not among the greatest of Scott's works, carry us back more than five hundred years. The new class of extempore novel writers, though more considerable than, sixty years ago, any one could have expected ever to see it, is still limited, and on any high level of merit will probably always be limited, to the delineation of the times of which the narrator has personal experience. Scott seemed to have had something very

like personal experience of a few centuries at least, judging by the ease and freshness with which he poured out his stories of these centuries, and though no one can pretend that even he could describe the period of the Tudors as Miss Austen described the country parsons and squires of George the Third's reign, or as Mr. Trollope describes the politicians and hunting-men of Queen Victoria's, it is nevertheless the evidence of a greater imagination to make us live so familiarly as Scott does amidst the political and religious controversies of two or three centuries' duration, to be the actual witnesses, as it were, of Margaret of Anjou's throes of vain ambition, and Mary Stuart's fascinating remorse, and Elizabeth's domineering and jealous balancings of noble against noble, of James the First's shrewd pedantries, and the Regent Murray's large forethought, of the politic craft of Argyle, the courtly ruthlessness of Claverhouse, and the high-bred clemency of Monmouth, than to reflect in countless modifications the freaks, figures, and fashions of our own time.

The most striking feature of Scott's romances is that, for the most part, they are pivoted on public rather than mere private interests and passions. With but few exceptions—(*The Antiquary*, *St. Ronan's Well*, and *Guy Mannering* are the most important)—Scott's novels give us an imaginative view, not of mere individuals, but of individuals as they are affected by the public strifes and social divisions of the age. And this it is which gives his books so large an interest for old and young, soldiers and statesmen, the world of society and the recluse, alike. You can hardly read any novel of Scott's and not become better aware what public life and political issues mean. And yet there is no artificiality, no elaborate attitudinizing before the antique mirrors of the past, like Bulwer's, no

dressing out of clothes-horses like G. P. R. James. The boldness and freshness of the present are carried back into the past, and you see Papists and Puritans, Cavaliers and Roundheads, Jews, Jacobites, and freebooters, preachers, schoolmasters, mercenary soldiers, gipsies, and beggars, all living the sort of life which the reader feels that in their circumstances and under the same conditions of time and place and parentage, he might have lived too. Indeed, no man can read Scott without being more of a public man, whereas the ordinary novel tends to make its readers rather less of one than before.

Next, though most of these stories are rightly called romances, no one can avoid observing that they give that side of life which is unromantic, quite as vigorously as the romantic side. This was not true of Scott's poems, which only expressed one-half of his nature, and were almost pure romances. But in the novels the business of life is even better portrayed than its sentiments. Mr. Bagehot, one of the ablest of Scott's critics, has pointed out this admirably in his essay on *The Waverley Novels*. "Many historical novelists," he says, "especialy those who with care and pains have read up the detail, are often evidently in a strait how to pass from their history to their sentiment. The fancy of Sir Walter could not help connecting the two. If he had given us the English side of the race to Derby, *he would have described the Bank of England paying in sixpences, and also the loves of the cashier.*" No one who knows the novels well can question this. Fergus MacIvor's ways and means, his careful arrangements for receiving subsidies in black mail, are as carefully recorded as his lavish highland hospitalities; and when he sends his silver cup to the Gaelic bard who chaunts his greatness, the faithful historian does not for-

get to let us know that the cup is his last, and that he is hard-pressed for the generosities of the future. So too the habitual thievishness of the highlanders is pressed upon us quite as vividly as their gallantry and superstitions. And so careful is Sir Walter to paint the petty pedantries of the Scotch traditional conservatism, that he will not spare even Charles Edward—of whom he draws so graceful a picture—the humiliation of submitting to old Bradwardine's "solemn act of homage," but makes him go through the absurd ceremony of placing his foot on a cushion to have its brogue unlatched by the dry old enthusiast of heraldic lore. Indeed it was because Scott so much enjoyed the contrast between the high sentiment of life and its dry and often absurd detail, that his imagination found so much freer a vent in the historical romance, than it ever found in the romantic poem. Yet he clearly needed the romantic excitement of picturesque scenes and historical interests, too. I do not think he would ever have gained any brilliant success in the narrower region of the domestic novel. He said himself, in expressing his admiration of Miss Austen, "The big bow-wow strain I can do myself, like any now going, but the exquisite touch which renders ordinary commonplace things and characters interesting, from the truth of the description and the sentiment, is denied to me." Indeed he tried it to some extent in *St. Ronan's Well*, and so far as he tried it, I think he failed. Scott needed a certain largeness of type, a strongly-marked class-life, and, where it was possible, a free, out-of-doors life, for his delineations. No one could paint beggars and gipsies, and wandering fiddlers, and mercenary soldiers, and peasants and farmers and lawyers, and magistrates, and preachers, and courtiers, and statesmen, and best of all perhaps queens

and kings, with anything like his ability. But when it came to describing the small differences of manner, differences not due to external habits, so much as to internal sentiment or education, or mere domestic circumstance, he was beyond his proper field. In the sketch of the St. Ronan's Spa and the company at the *table-d'hôte*, he is of course somewhere near the mark,—he was too able a man to fall far short of success in anything he really gave to the world; but it is not interesting. Miss Austen would have made Lady Penelope Penfeather a hundred times as amusing. We turn to Meg Dods and Touchwood, and Cargill, and Captain Jekyl, and Sir Bingo Binks, and to Clara Mowbray,—i. e. to the lives really moulded by large and specific causes, for enjoyment, and leave the small gossip of the company at the Wells as, relatively at least, a failure. And it is well for all the world that it was so. The domestic novel, when really of the highest kind, is no doubt a perfect work of art, and an unfailing source of amusement; but it has nothing of the tonic influence, the large instructiveness, the stimulating intellectual air, of Scott's historic tales. Even when Scott is farthest from reality—as in *Ivanhoe* or *The Monastery*—he makes you open your eyes to all sorts of historical conditions to which you would otherwise be blind. The domestic novel, even when its art is perfect, gives little but pleasure at the best; at the worst it is simply scandal idealized.

Scott often confessed his contempt for his own heroes. He said of Edward Waverley, for instance, that he was "a sneaking piece of imbecility," and that "if he had married Flora, she would have set him up upon the chimney-piece as Count Borowlaski's wife used to do with him. I am a bad hand at depicting a hero, pro-

perly so called, and have an unfortunate propensity for the dubious characters of borderers, buccaneers, highland robbers, and all others of a Robin-Hood description."[1] In another letter he says, "My rogue always, in despite of me, turns out my hero."[2] And it seems very likely that in most of the situations Scott describes so well, his own course would have been that of his wilder impulses, and not that of his reason. Assuredly he would never have stopped hesitating on the line between opposite courses as his Waverleys, his Mortons, his Osbaldistones do. Whenever he was really involved in a party strife, he flung prudence and impartiality to the winds, and went in like the hearty partisan which his strong impulses made of him. But granting this, I do not agree with his condemnation of all his own colourless heroes. However much they differed in nature from Scott himself, the even balance of their reason against their sympathies is certainly well conceived, is in itself natural, and is an admirable expedient for effecting that which was probably its real use to Scott,—the affording an opportunity for the delineation of all the pros and cons of the case, so that the characters on both sides of the struggle should be properly understood. Scott's imagination was clearly far wider—was far more permeated with the fixed air of sound judgment—than his practical impulses. He needed a machinery for displaying his insight into both sides of a public quarrel, and his colourless heroes gave him the instrument he needed. Both in Morton's case (in *Old Mortality*), and in Waverley's, the hesitation is certainly well described. Indeed in relation to the controversy between Covenanters and Royalists, while his political

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, iv. 175-6.
[2] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, iv. 46.

and martial prepossessions went with Claverhouse. his reason and educated moral feeling certainly were clearly identified with Morton.

It is, however, obviously true that Scott's heroes are mostly created for the sake of the facility they give in delineating the other characters, and not the other characters for the sake of the heroes. They are the imaginative neutral ground, as it were, on which opposing influences are brought to play; and what Scott best loved to paint was those who, whether by nature, by inheritance, or by choice, had become unique and characteristic types of one-sided feeling, not those who were merely in process of growth, and had not ranged themselves at all. Mr. Carlyle, who, as I have said before, places Scott's romances far below their real level, maintains that these great types of his are drawn from the outside, and not made actually to live. "His Bailie Jarvies, Dinmonts, Dalgettys (for their name is legion), do look and talk like what they give themselves out for; they are, if not *created* and made poetically alive, yet deceptively *enacted* as a good player might do them. What more is wanted, then? For the reader lying on a sofa, nothing more; yet for another sort of reader much. It were a long chapter to unfold the difference in drawing a character between a Scott and a Shakespeare or Goethe. Yet it is a difference literally immense; they are of a different species; the value of the one is not to be counted in the coin of the other. We might say in a short word, which covers a long matter, that your Shakespeare fashions his characters from the heart outwards; your Scott fashions them from the skin inwards, never getting near the heart of them. The one set become living men and women; the other amount to little more than mechanical cases, deceptively painted

automatons."[1] And then he goes on to contrast Fenella in *Peveril of the Peak* with Goethe's Mignon. Mr. Carlyle could hardly have chosen a less fair comparison. If Goethe is to be judged by his women, let Scott be judged by his men. So judged, I think Scott will, as a painter of character—of course, I am not now speaking of him as a poet,—come out far above Goethe. Excepting the hero of his first drama (Götz of the iron hand), which by the way was so much in Scott's line that his first essay in poetry was to translate it—not very well—I doubt if Goethe was ever successful with his pictures of men. *Wilhelm Meister* is, as Niebuhr truly said, "a ménagerie of tame animals." Doubtless Goethe's women—certainly his women of culture—are more truly and inwardly conceived and created than Scott's. Except Jeanie Deans and Madge Wildfire, and perhaps Lucy Ashton, Scott's women are apt to be uninteresting, either pink and white toys, or hardish women of the world. But then no one can compare the men of the two writers, and not see Scott's vast pre-eminence on that side.

I think the deficiency of his pictures of women, odd as it seems to say so, should be greatly attributed to his natural chivalry. His conception of women of his own or a higher class was always too romantic. He hardly ventured, as it were, in his tenderness for them, to look deeply into their little weaknesses and intricacies of character. With women of an inferior class, he had not this feeling. Nothing can be more perfect than the manner in which he blends the dairy-woman and woman of business in Jeanie Deans, with the lover and the sister. But once make a woman beautiful, or in any way an object of homage to him, and

[1] Carlyle's *Miscellaneous Essays*, iv. 174-5.

Scott bowed so low before the image of her, that he could not go deep into her heart. He could no more have analysed such a woman, as Thackeray analyzed Lady Castlewood, or Amelia, or Becky, or as George Eliot analysed Rosamond Vincy, than he could have vivisected Camp or Maida. To some extent, therefore, Scott's pictures of women remain something in the style of the miniatures of the last age—bright and beautiful beings without any special character in them. He was dazzled by a fair heroine. He could not take them up into his imagination as real beings as he did men. But then how living are his men, whether coarse or noble! What a picture, for instance, is that in *A Legend of Montrose* of the conceited, pragmatic, but prompt and dauntless soldier of fortune, rejecting Argyle's attempts to tamper with him, in the dungeon at Inverary, suddenly throwing himself on the disguised Duke so soon as he detects him by his voice, and wresting from him the means of his own liberation! Who could read that scene and say for a moment that Dalgetty is painted "from the skin inwards"? It was just Scott himself breathing his own life through the habits of a good specimen of the mercenary soldier—realizing where the spirit of hire would end, and the sense of honour would begin—and preferring, even in a dungeon, the audacious policy of a sudden attack to that of crafty negotiation. What a picture (and a very different one) again is that in *Redgauntlet* of Peter Peebles, the mad litigant, with face emaciated by poverty and anxiety, and rendered wild by "an insane lightness about the eyes," dashing into the English magistrate's court for a warrant against his fugitive counsel. Or, to take a third instance, as different as possible from either, how powerfully conceived is the situation in *Old Mortality*, where Balfour of Burley, in his fanatic fury at the defeat of his plan for a

new rebellion, pushes the oak-tree, which connects his wild retreat with the outer world, into the stream, and tries to slay Morton for opposing him. In such scenes and a hundred others—for these are mere random examples—Scott undoubtedly painted his masculine figures from as deep and inward a conception of the character of the situation as Goethe ever attained, even in drawing Mignon, or Klärchen, or Gretchen. The distinction has no real existence. Goethe's pictures of women were no doubt the intuitions of genius; and so are Scott's of men—and here and there of his women too. Professional women he can always paint with power. Meg Dods, the innkeeper, Meg Merrilies, the gipsy, Mause Headrigg, the Covenanter, Elspeth, the old fishwife in *The Antiquary*, and the old crones employed to nurse and watch, and lay out the corpse, in *The Bride of Lammermoor*, are all in their way impressive figures.

And even in relation to women of a rank more fascinating to Scott, and whose inner character was perhaps on that account, less familiar to his imagination, grant him but a few hints from history, and he draws a picture which, for vividness and brilliancy, may almost compare with Shakespeare's own studies in English history. Had Shakespeare painted the scene in *The Abbot*, in which Mary Stuart commands one of her Mary's in waiting to tell her at what bridal she last danced, and Mary Fleming blurts out the reference to the marriage of Sebastian at Holyrood, would any one hesitate to regard it as a stroke of genius worthy of the great dramatist? This picture of the Queen's mind suddenly thrown off its balance, and betraying, in the agony of the moment, the fear and remorse which every association with Darnley conjured up, is painted "from the heart outwards," not "from the

skin inwards," if ever there were such a painting in the world. Scott hardly ever failed in painting kings or peasants, queens or peasant-women. There was something in the well-marked type of both to catch his imagination, which can always hit off the grander features of royalty, and the homelier features of laborious humility. Is there any sketch traced in lines of more sweeping grandeur and more impressive force than the following of Mary Stuart's lucid interval of remorse—lucid compared with her ordinary mood, though it was of a remorse that was almost delirious—which breaks in upon her hour of fascinating condescension?—

"'Are they not a lovely couple, my Fleming? and is it not heart-rending to think that I must be their ruin?'

"'Not so,' said Roland Græme, 'it is we, gracious sovereign, who will be your deliverers.' '*Ex oribus parvulorum!*' said the queen, looking upward; 'if it is by the mouth of these children that heaven calls me to resume the stately thoughts which become my birth and my rights, thou wilt grant them thy protection, and to me the power of rewarding their zeal.' Then turning to Fleming, she instantly added, 'Thou knowest, my friend, whether to make those who have served me happy, was not ever Mary's favourite pastime. When I have been rebuked by the stern preachers of the Calvinistic heresy—when I have seen the fierce countenances of my nobles averted from me, has it not been because I mixed in the harmless pleasures of the young and gay, and rather for the sake of their happiness than my own, have mingled in the masque, the song or the dance, with the youth of my household? Well, I repent not of it—though Knox termed it sin, and Morton degradation—I was happy because I saw happiness around me: and woe betide the wretched jealousy that can extract guilt out of the overflowings of an unguarded gaiety!—Fleming, if we are restored to our throne, shall we not have one blithesome day at a blithesome bridal, of which we must now name neither the bride nor the bridegroom? But that

bridegroom shall have the barony of Blairgowrie, a fair gift even for a queen to give, and that bride's chaplet shall be twined with the fairest pearls that ever were found in the depths of Lochlomond; and thou thyself, Mary Fleming, the best dresser of tires that ever busked the tresses of a queen, and who would scorn to touch those of any woman of lower rank—thou thyself shalt for my love twine them into the bride's tresses.—Look, my Fleming, suppose then such clustered locks as these of our Catherine, they would not put shame upon thy skill.' So saying she passed her hand fondly over the head of her youthful favourite, while her more aged attendant replied despondently, 'Alas, madam, your thoughts stray far from home.' 'They do, my Fleming,' said the queen, 'but is it well or kind in you to call them back?—God knows they have kept the perch this night but too closely.—Come, I will recall the gay vision, were it but to punish them. Yes, at that blithesome bridal, Mary herself shall forget the weight of sorrows, and the toil of state, and herself once more lead a measure.—At whose wedding was it that we last danced, my Fleming? I think care has troubled my memory—yet something of it I should remember, canst thou not aid me? I know thou canst.' 'Alas, madam,' replied the lady. 'What,' said Mary, 'wilt thou not help us so far? this is a peevish adherence to thine own graver opinion which holds our talk as folly. But thou art court-bred and wilt well understand me when I say the queen *commands* Lady Fleming to tell her when she led the last *branle*.' With a face deadly pale and a mien as if she were about to sink into the earth, the court-bred dame, no longer daring to refuse obedience, faltered out, 'Gracious lady—if my memory err not—it was at a masque in Holyrood—at the marriage of Sebastian.' The unhappy queen, who had hitherto listened with a melancholy smile, provoked by the reluctance with which the Lady Fleming brought out her story, at this ill-fated word interrupted her with a shriek so wild and loud that the vaulted apartment rang, and both Roland and Catherine sprung to their feet in the utmost terror and alarm. Meantime, Mary seemed, by the

train of horrible ideas thus suddenly excited, surprised not only beyond self-command, but for the moment beyond the verge of reason. 'Traitress,' she said to the Lady Fleming, 'thou wouldst slay thy sovereign. Call my French guards—*à moi! à moi! mes Français!*—I am beset with traitors in mine own palace—they have murdered my husband—Rescue! Rescue! for the Queen of Scotland!' She started up from her chair—her features late so exquisitely lovely in their paleness, now inflamed with the fury of frenzy, and resembling those of a Bellona. 'We will take the field ourself,' she said; 'warn the city—warn Lothian and Fife—saddle our Spanish barb, and bid French Paris see our petronel be charged. Better to die at the head of our brave Scotsmen, like our grandfather at Flodden, than of a broken heart like our ill-starred father.' 'Be patient—be composed, dearest sovereign,' said Catherine; and then addressing Lady Fleming angrily, she added, 'How could you say aught that reminded her of her husband?' The word reached the ear of the unhappy princess who caught it up, speaking with great rapidity, 'Husband!—what husband? Not his most Christian Majesty—he is ill at ease—he cannot mount on horseback—not him of the Lennox—but it was the Duke of Orkney thou wouldst say?' 'For God's love, madam, be patient!' said the Lady Fleming. But the queen's excited imagination could by no entreaty be diverted from its course. 'Bid him come hither to our aid,' she said, 'and bring with him his lambs, as he calls them—Bowton, Hay of Talla, Black Ormiston and his kinsman Hob—Fie, how swart they are, and how they smell of sulphur! What! closeted with Morton? Nay, if the Douglas and the Hepburn hatch the complot together, the bird when it breaks the shell will scare Scotland, will it not, my Fleming?' 'She grows wilder and wilder,' said Fleming. 'We have too many hearers for these strange words.' 'Roland,'' said Catherine, 'in the name of God begone!—you cannot aid us here—leave us to deal with her alone—away—away!''

And equally fine is the scene in *Kenilworth* in which

Elizabeth undertakes the reconciliation of the haughty rivals, Sussex and Leicester, unaware that in the course of the audience she herself will have to bear a great strain on her self-command, both in her feelings as a queen and her feelings as a lover. Her grand rebukes to both, her ill-concealed preference for Leicester, her whispered ridicule of Sussex, the impulses of tenderness which she stifles, the flashes of resentment to which she gives way, the triumph of policy over private feeling, her imperious impatience when she is baffled, her jealousy as she grows suspicious of a personal rival, her gratified pride and vanity when the suspicion is exchanged for the clear evidence, as she supposes, of Leicester's love, and her peremptory conclusion of the audience, bring before the mind a series of pictures far more vivid and impressive than the greatest of historical painters could fix on canvas, even at the cost of the labour of years. Even more brilliant, though not so sustained and difficult an effort of genius, is the later scene in the same story, in which Elizabeth drags the unhappy Countess of Leicester from her concealment in one of the grottoes of Kenilworth Castle, and strides off with her, in a fit of vindictive humiliation and Amazonian fury, to confront her with her husband. But this last scene no doubt is more in Scott's way. He can always paint women in their more masculine moods. Where he frequently fails is in the attempt to indicate the finer shades of women's nature. In Amy Robsart herself, for example, he is by no means generally successful, though in an early scene her childish delight in the various orders and decorations of her husband is painted with much freshness and delicacy. But wherever, as in the case of queens, Scott can get a telling hint from actual history, he can always so use it

as to make history itself seem dim to the equivalent for it which he gives us.

And yet, as every one knows, Scott was excessively free in his manipulations of history for the purposes of romance. In *Kenilworth* he represents Shakespeare's plays as already in the mouths of courtiers and statesmen, though he lays the scene in the eighteenth year of Elizabeth, when Shakespeare was hardly old enough to rob an orchard. In *Woodstock*, on the contrary, he insists, if you compare Sir Henry Lee's dates with the facts, that Shakespeare died twenty years at least before he actually died. The historical basis, again, of *Woodstock* and of *Redgauntlet* is thoroughly untrustworthy, and about all the minuter details of history,—unless so far as they were characteristic of the age,—I do not suppose that Scott in his romances ever troubled himself at all. And yet few historians—not even Scott himself when he exchanged romance for history—ever drew the great figures of history with so powerful a hand. In writing history and biography Scott has little or no advantage over very inferior men. His pictures of Swift, of Dryden, of Napoleon, are in no way very vivid. It is only where he is working from the pure imagination,—though imagination stirred by historic study,—that he paints a picture which follows us about, as if with living eyes, instead of creating for us a mere series of lines and colours. Indeed, whether Scott draws truly or falsely, he draws with such genius that his pictures of Richard and Saladin, of Louis XI. and Charles the Bold, of Margaret of Anjou and René of Provence, of Mary Stuart and Elizabeth Tudor, of Sussex and of Leicester, of James and Charles and Buckingham, of the two Dukes of Argyle—the Argyle of the time of the revolution, and the Argyle of George II.,—

of Queen Caroline, of Claverhouse, and Monmouth, and of Rob Roy, will live in English literature beside Shakespeare's pictures—probably less faithful if more imaginative—of John and Richard and the later Henries, and all the great figures by whom they were surrounded. No historical portrait that we possess will take precedence—as a mere portrait—of Scott's brilliant study of James I. in *The Fortunes of Nigel*. Take this illustration for instance, where George Heriot the goldsmith (Jingling Geordie, as the king familiarly calls him) has just been speaking of Lord Huntinglen, as "a man of the old rough world that will drink and swear:"—

"'O Geordie!' exclaimed the king, 'these are auld-warld frailties, of whilk we dare not pronounce even ourselves absolutely free. But the warld grows worse from day to day, Geordie. The juveniles of this age may weel say with the poet,—

"Ætas parentum pejor avis tulit
Nos nequiores—"

This Dalgarno does not drink so much, aye or swear so much, as his father, but he wenches, Geordie, and he breaks his word and oath baith. As to what ye say of the leddy and the ministers, we are all fallible creatures, Geordie, priests and kings as weel as others; and wha kens but what that may account for the difference between this Dalgarno and his father? The earl is the vera soul of honour, and cares nae mair for warld's gear than a noble hound for the quest of a foulmart; but as for his son, he was like to brazen us all out—ourselves, Steenie, Baby Charles, and our Council, till he heard of the tocher, and then by my kingly crown he lap like a cock at a grossart! These are discrepancies betwixt parent and son not to be accounted for naturally, according to Baptista Porta, Michael Scott *de secretis*, and others. Ah, Jingling Geordie, if your clouting the caldron, and jingling on pots, pans, and veshels of all manner of

metal, hadna jingled a' your grammar out of your head, I could have touched on that matter to you at mair length.' . . . . Heriot inquired whether Lord Dalgarno had consented to do the Lady Hermione justice. 'Troth, man, I have small doubt that he will,' quoth the king, 'I gave him the schedule of her worldly substance, which you delivered to us in the council, and we allowed him half an hour to chew the cud upon that. It is rare reading for bringing him to reason. I left Baby Charles and Steenie laying his duty before him, and if he can resist doing what *they* desire him, why I wish he would teach *me* the gate of it. O Geordie, Jingling Geordie, it was grand to hear Baby Charles laying down the guilt of dissimulation, and Steenie lecturing on the turpitude of incontinence.' 'I am afraid,' said George Heriot, more hastily than prudently, 'I might have thought of the old proverb of Satan reproving sin.' 'Deil hae our saul, neighbour,' said the king, reddening, 'but ye are not blate! I gie ye licence to speak freely, and by our saul, ye do not let the privilege become lost, *non utendo*—it will suffer no negative prescription in your hands. Is it fit, think ye, that Baby Charles should let his thoughts be publicly seen? No, no, princes' thoughts are *arcana imperii: qui nescit dissimulare, nescit regnare.* Every liege subject is bound to speak the whole truth to the king, but there is nae reciprocity of obligation—and for Steenie having been whiles a dike-louper at a time, is it for you, who are his goldsmith, and to whom, I doubt, he awes an uncomatable sum, to cast that up to him?"

Assuredly there is no undue favouring of Stuarts in such a picture as that.

Scott's humour is, I think, of very different qualities in relation to different subjects. Certainly he was at times capable of considerable heaviness of hand,—of the Scotch "wut" which has been so irreverently treated by English critics. His rather elaborate jocular introductions, under the name of Jedediah Cleishbotham, are clearly

laborious at times. And even his own letters to his daughter-in-law, which Mr. Lockhart seems to regard as models of tender playfulness and pleasantry, seem to me decidedly elephantine. Not unfrequently, too, his stereotyped jokes weary. Dalgetty bores you almost as much as he would do in real life,—which is a great fault in art. Bradwardine becomes a nuisance, and as for Sir Piercie Shafton, he is beyond endurance. Like some other Scotchmen of genius, Scott twanged away at any effective chord till it more than lost its expressiveness. But in dry humour, and in that higher humour which skilfully blends the ludicrous and the pathetic, so that it is hardly possible to separate between smiles and tears, Scott is a master. His canny innkeeper, who, having sent away all the peasemeal to the camp of the Covenanters, and all the oatmeal (with deep professions of duty) to the castle and its cavaliers, in compliance with the requisitions sent to him on each side, admits with a sigh to his daughter that "they maun gar wheat flour serve themsels for a blink,"—his firm of solicitors, Greenhorn and Grinderson, whose senior partner writes respectfully to clients in prosperity, and whose junior partner writes familiarly to those in adversity,—his arbitrary nabob who asks how the devil any one should be able to mix spices so well "as one who has been where they grow;"—his little ragamuffin who indignantly denies that he has broken his promise not to gamble away his sixpences at pitch-and-toss because he has gambled them away at "neevie-neevie-nick-nack,"—and similar figures abound in his tales,—are all creations which make one laugh inwardly as we read. But he has a much higher humour still, that inimitable power of shading off ignorance into knowledge and simplicity into wisdom, which makes his picture of Jeanie Deans, for

instance, so humorous as well as so affecting. When Jeanie reunites her father to her husband by reminding the former how it would sometimes happen that "twa precious saints might pu' sundrywise like twa cows riving at the same hayband," she gives us an admirable instance of Scott's higher humour. Or take Jeanie Deans's letter to her father communicating to him the pardon of his daughter and her own interview with the Queen :—

"DEAREST AND TRULY HONOURED FATHER.—This comes with my duty to inform you, that it has pleased God to redeem that captivitie of my poor sister, in respect the Queen's blessed Majesty, for whom we are ever bound to pray, hath redeemed her soul from the slayer, granting the ransom of her, whilk is ane pardon or reprieve. And I spoke with the Queen face to face, and yet live; for she is not muckle differing from other grand leddies, saving that she has a stately presence, and een like a blue huntin' hawk's, whilk gaed throu' and throu' me like a Highland durk—And all this good was, alway under the Great Giver, to whom all are but instruments, wrought for us by the Duk of Argile, wha is ane native true-hearted Scotsman, and not pridefu', like other folk we ken of—and likewise skeely enow in bestial, whereof he has promised to gie me twa Devonshire kye, of which he is enamoured, although I do still haud by the real hawkit Airshire breed—and I have promised him a cheese; and I wad wuss ye, if Gowans, the brockit cow, has a quey, that she suld suck her fill of milk, as I am given to understand he has none of that breed, and is not scornfu' but will take a thing frae a puir body, that it may lighten their heart of the loading of debt that they awe him. Also his honour the Duke will accept ane of our Dunlop cheeses, and it sall be my faut if a better was ever yearned in Lowden."—[Here follow some observations respecting the breed of cattle, and the produce of the dairy, which it is our intention to forward to the Board of Agriculture.]—"Nevertheless, these are but matters of the after-harvest, in respect of the great good which Providence hath gifted us with—and, in especial, poor

Effie's life. And oh, my dear father, since it hath pleased God to be merciful to her, let her not want your free pardon, whilk will make her meet to be ane vessel of grace, and also a comfort to your ain graie hairs. Dear Father, will ye let the Laird ken that we have had friends strangely raised up to us, and that the talent whilk he lent me will be thankfully repaid. I hae some of it to the fore; and the rest of it is not knotted up in ane purse or napkin, but in ane wee bit paper, as is the fashion heir, whilk I am assured is gude for the siller. And, dear father, through Mr. Butler's means I hae gude friendship with the Duke, for there had been kindness between their forbears in the auld troublesome time byepast. And Mrs. Glass has been kind like my very mother. She has a braw house here, and lives bien and warm, wi' twa servant lasses, and a man and a callant in the shop. And she is to send you doun a pound of her hiedried, and some other tobaka, and we maun think of some propine for her, since her kindness hath been great. And the Duk is to send the pardon doun by an express messenger, in respect that I canna travel sae fast; and I am to come doun wi' twa of his Honour's servants—that is, John Archibald, a decent elderly gentleman, that says he has seen you lang syne, when ye were buying beasts in the west frae the Laird of Aughtermuggitie—but maybe ye winna mind him—ony way, he's a civil man—and Mrs. Dolly Dutton, that is to be dairy-maid at Inverara: and they bring me on as far as Glasgo', whilk will make it nae pinch to win hame, whilk I desire of all things. May the Giver of all good things keep ye in your outgauns and incomings, whereof devoutly prayeth your loving dauter,

"Jean Deans."

This contains an example of Scott's rather heavy jocularity as well as giving us a fine illustration of his highest and deepest and sunniest humour. Coming where it does, the joke inserted about the Board of Agriculture is rather like the gambol of a rhinoceros trying to imitate the curvettings of a thoroughbred horse.

Some of the finest touches of his humour are no doubt much heightened by his perfect command of the genius as well as the dialect of a peasantry, in whom a true culture of mind and sometimes also of heart is found in the closest possible contact with the humblest pursuits and the quaintest enthusiasm for them. But Scott, with all his turn for irony—and Mr. Lockhart says that even on his death-bed he used towards his children the same sort of good-humoured irony to which he had always accustomed them in his life—certainly never gives us any example of that highest irony which is found so frequently in Shakespeare, which touches the paradoxes of the spiritual life of the children of earth, and which reached its highest point in Isaiah. Now and then in his latest diaries—the diaries written in his deep affliction—he comes near the edge of it. Once, for instance, he says, "What a strange scene if the surge of conversation could suddenly ebb like the tide, and show us the state of people's real minds!

> 'No eyes the rocks discover
> Which lurk beneath the deep.'

Life could not be endured were it seen in reality." But this is not irony, only the sort of meditation which, in a mind inclined to thrust deep into the secrets of life's paradoxes, is apt to lead to irony. Scott, however, does not thrust deep in this direction. He met the cold steel which inflicts the deepest interior wounds, like a soldier, and never seems to have meditated on the higher paradoxes of life till reason reeled. The irony of Hamlet is far from Scott. His imagination was essentially one of distinct embodiment. He never even seemed so much as to contemplate that sundering of substance and form, that rending

away of outward garments, that unclothing of the soul, in order that it might be more effectually clothed upon, which is at the heart of anything that may be called spiritual irony. The constant abiding of his mind within the well-defined forms of some one or other of the conditions of outward life and manners, among the scores of different spheres of human habit, was, no doubt, one of the secrets of his genius; but it was also its greatest limitation.

## CHAPTER XI.

### MORALITY AND RELIGION.

The very same causes which limited Scott's humour and irony to the commoner fields of experience, and prevented him from ever introducing into his stories characters of the highest type of moral thoughtfulness, gave to his own morality and religion, which were, I think, true to the core so far as they went, a shade of distinct conventionality. It is no doubt quite true, as he himself tells us, that he took more interest in his mercenaries and moss-troopers, outlaws, gipsies, and beggars, than he did in the fine ladies and gentlemen under a cloud whom he adopted as heroines and heroes. But that was the very sign of his conventionalism. Though he interested himself more in these irregular persons, he hardly ever ventured to paint their inner life so as to show how little there was to choose between the sins of those who are at war with society and the sins of those who bend to the yoke of society. He widened rather than narrowed the chasm between the outlaw and the respectable citizen, even while he did not disguise his own romantic interest in the former. He extenuated, no doubt, the sins of all brave and violent defiers of the law, as distinguished from the sins of crafty and cunning abusers of the law. But the leaning he had to the former was, as he was willing to

admit, what he regarded as a "naughty" leaning. He did not attempt for a moment to balance accounts between them and society. He paid his tribute as a matter of course to the established morality, and only put in a word or two by way of attempt to diminish the severity of the sentence on the bold transgressor. And then, where what is called the "law of honour" comes in to traverse the law of religion, he had no scruple in setting aside the latter in favour of the customs of gentlemen, without any attempt to justify that course. Yet it is evident from various passages in his writings that he held Christian duty inconsistent with duelling, and that he held himself a sincere Christian. In spite of this, when he was fifty-six, and under no conceivable hurry or perturbation of feeling, but only concerned to defend his own conduct —which was indeed plainly right—as to a political disclosure which he had made in his life of Napoleon, he asked his old friend William Clerk to be his second, if the expected challenge from General Gourgaud should come, and declared his firm intention of accepting it. On the strength of official evidence he had exposed some conduct of General Gourgaud's at St. Helena, which appeared to be far from honourable, and he thought it his duty on that account to submit to be shot at by General Gourgaud, if General Gourgaud had wished it. In writing to William Clerk to ask him to be his second, he says, "Like a man who finds himself in a scrape, General Gourgaud may wish to fight himself out of it, and if the quarrel should be thrust on me, why, *I will not baulk him, Jackie.* He shall not dishonour the country through my sides, I can assure him." In other words, Scott acted just as he had made Waverley and others of his heroes act, on a code of honour which he knew to be false, and he must have felt

in this case to be something worse. He thought himself at that time under the most stringent obligations both to his creditors and his children, to do all in his power to redeem himself and his estate from debt. Nay, more, he held that his life was a trust from his Creator, which he had no right to throw away merely because a man whom he had not really injured, was indulging a strong wish to injure him; but he could so little brook the imputation of physical cowardice, that he was moral coward enough to resolve to meet General Gourgaud, if General Gourgaud lusted after a shot at him. Nor is there any trace preserved of so much as a moral scruple in his own mind on the subject, and this though there are clear traces in his other writings as to what he thought Christian morality required. But the Border chivalry was so strong in Scott that, on subjects of this kind at least, his morality was the conventional morality of a day rapidly passing away.

He showed the same conventional feeling in his severity towards one of his own brothers who had been guilty of cowardice. Daniel Scott was the black sheep of the family. He got into difficulties in business, formed a bad connexion with an artful woman, and was sent to try his fortunes in the West Indies. There he was employed in some service against a body of refractory negroes—we do not know its exact nature—and apparently showed the white feather. Mr. Lockhart says that "he returned to Scotland a dishonoured man; and though he found shelter and compassion from his mother, his brother would never see him again. Nay, when, soon after, his health, shattered by dissolute indulgence, . . . gave way altogether, and he died, as yet a young man, the poet refused either to attend his funeral or to wear mourning for him, like the

rest of his family."[1] Indeed he always spoke of him as his "relative," not as his brother. Here again Scott's severity was due to his brother's failure as a "man of honour," i. e. in courage. He was forbearing enough with vices of a different kind; made John Ballantyne's dissipation the object rather of his jokes than of his indignation; and not only mourned for him, but really grieved for him when he died. It is only fair to say, however, that for this conventional scorn of a weakness rather than a sin, Scott sorrowed sincerely later in life, and that in sketching the physical cowardice of Connochar in *The Fair Maid of Perth*, he deliberately made an attempt to atone for this hardness towards his brother by showing how frequently the foundation of cowardice may be laid in perfectly involuntary physical temperament, and pointing out with what noble elements of disposition it may be combined. But till reflection on many forms of human character had enlarged Scott's charity, and perhaps also the range of his speculative ethics, he remained a conventional moralist, and one, moreover, the type of whose conventional code was borrowed more from that of honour than from that of religious principle. There is one curious passage in his diary, written very near the end of his life, in which Scott even seems to declare that conventional standards of conduct are better, or at least safer, than religious standards of conduct. He says in his diary for the 15th April, 1828,—"Dined with Sir Robert Inglis, and met Sir Thomas Acland, my old and kind friend. I was happy to see him. He may be considered now as the head of the religious party in the House of Commons—a powerful body which Wilberforce long commanded. It is a difficult situation, for the adaptation of religious motives to earthly

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, iii. 198-9.

policy is apt—among the infinite delusions of the human heart—to be a snare."[1] His letters to his eldest son, the young cavalry officer, on his first start in life, are much admired by Mr. Lockhart, but to me they read a little hard, a little worldly, and extremely conventional. Conventionality was certainly to his mind almost a virtue.

Of enthusiasm in religion Scott always spoke very severely, both in his novels and in his letters and private diary. In writing to Lord Montague, he speaks of such enthusiasm as was then prevalent at Oxford, and which makes, he says, "religion a motive and a pretext for particular lines of thinking in politics and in temporal affairs" [as if it could help doing that!] as "teaching a new way of going to the devil for God's sake," and this expressly, because when the young are infected with it, it disunites families, and sets "children in opposition to their parents."[2] He gives us, however, one reason for his dread of anything like enthusiasm, which is not conventional;—that it interferes with the submissive and tranquil mood which is the only true religious mood. Speaking in his diary of a weakness and fluttering at the heart, from which he had suffered, he says, "It is an awful sensation, and would have made an enthusiast of me, had I indulged my imagination on religious subjects. I have been always careful to place my mind in the most tranquil posture which it can assume, during my private exercises of devotion."[3] And in this avoidance of indulging the imagination on religious, or even spiritual subjects, Scott goes far beyond Shakespeare. I do not think there is a single study in all his romances

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, ix. 231.
[2] Ibid., vii. 255-6. [3] Ibid., viii. 292.

of what may be fairly called a pre-eminently spiritual character as such, though Jeanie Deans approaches nearest to it. The same may be said of Shakespeare. But Shakespeare, though he has never drawn a pre-eminently spiritual character, often enough indulged his imagination while meditating on spiritual themes.

## CHAPTER XII.

### DISTRACTIONS AND AMUSEMENTS AT ABBOTSFORD.

BETWEEN 1814 and the end of 1825, Scott's literary labour was interrupted only by one serious illness, and hardly interrupted by that,—by a few journeys,—one to Paris after the battle of Waterloo, and several to London, —and by the worry of a constant stream of intrusive visitors. Of his journeys he has left some records; but I cannot say that I think Scott would ever have reached, as a mere observer and recorder, at all the high point which he reached directly his imagination went to work to create a story. That imagination was, indeed, far less subservient to his mere perceptions than to his constructive powers. *Paul's Letters to his Kinsfolk*—the records of his Paris journey after Waterloo—for instance, are not at all above the mark of a good special correspondent. His imagination was less the imagination of insight, than the imagination of one whose mind was a great kaleidoscope of human life and fortunes. But far more interrupting than either illness or travel, was the lion-hunting of which Scott became the object, directly after the publication of the earlier novels. In great measure, no doubt, on account of the mystery as to his authorship, his fame became something oppressive. At one time as many as *sixteen* parties of visitors applied to see Abbotsford in a single day. Strangers,—especially the American travel-

lers of that day, who were much less reticent and more irrepressible than the American travellers of this,—would come to him without introductions, facetiously cry out "Prodigious!" in imitation of Dominie Sampson, whatever they were shown, inquire whether the new house was called Tullyveolan or Tillytudlem, cross-examine, with open note-books, as to Scott's age, and the age of his wife, and appear to be taken quite by surprise when they were bowed out without being asked to dine.[1] In those days of high postage Scott's bill for letters "seldom came under 150*l.* a year," and "as to coach parcels, they were a perfect ruination." On one occasion a mighty package came by post from the United States, for which Scott had to pay five pounds sterling. It contained a MS. play called *The Cherokee Lovers*, by a young lady of New York, who begged Scott to read and correct it, write a prologue and epilogue, get it put on the stage at Drury Lane, and negotiate with Constable or Murray for the copyright. In about a fortnight another packet not less formidable arrived, charged with a similar postage, which Scott, not grown cautious through experience, recklessly opened; out jumped a duplicate copy of *The Cherokee Lovers*, with a second letter from the authoress, stating that as the weather had been stormy, and she feared that something might have happened to her former MS., she had thought it prudent to send him a duplicate.[2] Of course, when fame reached such a point as this, it became both a worry and a serious waste of money, and what was far more valuable than money, of time, privacy, and tranquillity of mind. And though no man ever bore such worries with the equanimity of Scott, no man ever received less plea-

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, v. 387.

[2] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, v. 382.

sure from the adulation of unknown and often vulgar and ignorant admirers. His real amusements were his trees and his friends. "Planting and pruning trees," he said, "I could work at from morning to night. There is a sort of self-congratulation, a little tickling self-flattery, in the idea that while you are pleasing and amusing yourself, you are seriously contributing to the future welfare of the country, and that your very acorn may send its future ribs of oak to future victories like Trafalgar,"[1]—for the day of iron ships was not yet. And again, at a later stage of his planting:—"You can have no idea of the exquisite delight of a planter,—he is like a painter laying on his colours,—at every moment he sees his effects coming out. There is no art or occupation comparable to this; it is full of past, present, and future enjoyment. I look back to the time when there was not a tree here, only bare heath; I look round and see thousands of trees growing up, all of which, I may say almost each of which, have received my personal attention. I remember, five years ago, looking forward with the most delighted expectation to this very hour, and as each year has passed, the expectation has gone on increasing. I do the same now. I anticipate what this plantation and that one will presently be, if only taken care of, and there is not a spot of which I do not watch the progress. Unlike building, or even painting, or indeed any other kind of pursuit, this has no end, and is never interrupted; but goes on from day to day, and from year to year, with a perpetually augmenting interest. Farming I hate. What have I to do with fattening and killing beasts, or raising corn, only to cut it down, and to wrangle with farmers about prices, and to be constantly at the mercy of the seasons? There can be no

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, iii. 288.

such disappointments or annoyances in planting trees."[1] Scott indeed regarded planting as a mode of so moulding the form and colour of the outward world, that nature herself became indebted to him for finer outlines, richer masses of colour, and deeper shadows, as well as for more fertile and sheltered soils. And he was as skilful in producing the last result, as he was in the artistic effects of his planting. In the essay on the planting of waste lands, he mentions a story,—drawn from his own experience,—of a planter, who having scooped out the lowest part of his land for enclosures, and "planted the wood round them in masses enlarged or contracted as the natural lying of the ground seemed to dictate," met, six years after these changes, his former tenant on the ground, and said to him, "I suppose, Mr. R——, you will say I have ruined your farm by laying half of it into woodland?" "I should have expected it, sir," answered Mr. R——, "if you had told me beforehand what you were going to do; but I am now of a very different opinion; and as I am looking for land at present, if you are inclined to take for the remaining sixty acres the same rent which I formerly gave for a hundred and twenty, I will give you an offer to that amount. I consider the benefit of the enclosing, and the complete shelter afforded to the fields, as an advantage which fairly counterbalances the loss of one-half of the land."[2]

And Scott was not only thoughtful in his own planting, but induced his neighbours to become so too. So great was their regard for him, that many of them planted their estates as much with reference to the effect which their plantations would have on the view from Abbotsford, as with reference to the effect they would

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, vii. 287-8.

[2] Scott's *Miscellaneous Prose Works*, xxi. 22-3.

have on the view from their own grounds. Many was the consultation which he and his neighbours, Scott of Gala, for instance, and Mr. Henderson of Eildon Hall, had together on the effect which would be produced on the view from their respective houses, of the planting going on upon the lands of each. The reciprocity of feeling was such that the various proprietors acted more like brothers in this matter, than like the jealous and exclusive creatures which landowners, as such, so often are.

Next to his interest in the management and growth of his own little estate was Scott's interest in the management and growth of the Duke of Buccleuch's. To the Duke he looked up as the head of his clan, with something almost more than a feudal attachment, greatly enhanced of course by the personal friendship which he had formed for him in early life as the Earl of Dalkeith. This mixture of feudal and personal feeling towards the Duke and Duchess of Buccleuch continued during their lives. Scott was away on a yachting tour to the Shetlands and Orkneys in July and August, 1814, and it was during this absence that the Duchess of Buccleuch died. Scott, who was in no anxiety about her, employed himself in writing an amusing descriptive epistle to the Duke in rough verse, chronicling his voyage, and containing expressions of the profoundest reverence for the goodness and charity of the Duchess, a letter which did not reach its destination till after the Duchess's death. Scott himself heard of her death by chance when they landed for a few hours on the coast of Ireland; he was quite overpowered by the news, and went to bed only to drop into short nightmare sleeps, and to wake with the dim memory of some heavy weight at his heart. The Duke himself died five years later, leaving

a son only thirteen years of age (the present Duke), over whose interests, both as regarded his education and his estates, Scott watched as jealously as if they had been those of his own son. Many were the anxious letters he wrote to Lord Montague as to his "young chief's" affairs, as he called them, and great his pride in watching the promise of his youth. Nothing can be clearer than that to Scott the feudal principle was something far beyond a name; that he had at least as much pride in his devotion to his chief, as he had in founding a house which he believed would increase the influence—both territorial and personal—of the clan of Scotts. The unaffected reverence which he felt for the Duke, though mingled with warm personal affection, showed that Scott's feudal feeling had something real and substantial in it, which did not vanish even when it came into close contact with strong personal feelings. This reverence is curiously marked in his letters. He speaks of "the distinction of rank" being ignored by both sides, as of something quite exceptional, but it was never really ignored by him, for though he continued to write to the Duke as an intimate friend, it was with a mingling of awe, very different indeed from that which he ever adopted to Ellis or Erskine. It is necessary to remember this, not only in estimating the strength of the feeling which made him so anxious to become himself the founder of a house within a house,—of a new branch of the clan of Scotts,—but in estimating the loyalty which Scott always displayed to one of the least respectable of English sovereigns, George IV.,—a matter of which I must now say a few words, not only because it led to Scott's receiving the baronetcy, but because it forms to my mind the most grotesque of all the threads in the lot of this strong and proud man.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### SCOTT AND GEORGE IV.

THE first relations of Scott with the Court were, oddly enough, formed with the Princess, not with the Prince of Wales. In 1806 Scott dined with the Princess of Wales at Blackheath, and spoke of his invitation as a great honour. He wrote a tribute to her father, the Duke of Brunswick, in the introduction to one of the cantos of *Marmion*, and received from the Princess a silver vase in acknowledgment of this passage in the poem. Scott's relations with the Prince Regent seem to have begun in an offer to Scott of the Laureateship in the summer of 1813, an offer which Scott would have found it very difficult to accept, so strongly did his pride revolt at the idea of having to commemorate in verse, as an official duty, all conspicuous incidents affecting the throne. But he was at the time of the offer in the thick of his first difficulties on account of Messrs. John Ballantyne and Co., and it was only the Duke of Buccleuch's guarantee of 4000*l.*—a guarantee subsequently cancelled by Scott's paying the sum for which it was a security—that enabled him at this time to decline what, after Southey had accepted it, he compared in a letter to Southey to the herring for which the poor Scotch clergyman gave thanks in a grace wherein he described it as "even this, the very least of Providence's mercies."

In March, 1815, Scott being then in London, the Prince Regent asked him to dinner, addressed him uniformly as Walter, and struck up a friendship with him which seems to have lasted their lives, and which certainly did much more honour to George than to Sir Walter Scott. It is impossible not to think rather better of George IV. for thus valuing, and doing his best in every way to show his value for, Scott. It is equally impossible not to think rather worse of Scott for thus valuing, and in every way doing his best to express his value for, this very worthless, though by no means incapable king. The consequences were soon seen in the indignation with which Scott began to speak of the Princess of Wales's sins. In 1806, in the squib he wrote on Lord Melville's acquittal, when impeached for corruption by the Liberal Government, he had written thus of the Princess Caroline :—

"Our King, too—our Princess,—I dare not say more, sir,—
May Providence watch them with mercy and might!
While there's one Scottish hand that can wag a claymore, sir,
They shall ne'er want a friend to stand up for their right.
Be damn'd he that dare not—
For my part I'll spare not
To beauty afflicted a tribute to give;
Fill it up steadily,
Drink it off readily,
Here's to the Princess, and long may she live."

But whoever "stood up" for the Princess's right, certainly Scott did not do so after his intimacy with the Prince Regent began. He mentioned her only with severity, and in one letter at least, written to his brother, with something much coarser than severity;[1] but the king's similar vices did not at all alienate him from what at

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, vi. 229-30.

least had all the appearance of a deep personal devotion to his sovereign. The first baronet whom George IV. made on succeeding to the throne, after his long Regency, was Scott, who not only accepted the honour gratefully, but dwelt with extreme pride on the fact that it was offered to him by the king himself, and was in no way due to the prompting of any minister's advice. He wrote to Joanna Baillie on hearing of the Regent's intention—for the offer was made by the Regent at the end of 1818, though it was not actually conferred till after George's accession, namely, on the 30th March, 1820,—"The Duke of Buccleuch and Scott of Harden, who, as the heads of my clan and the sources of my gentry, are good judges of what I ought to do, have both given me their earnest opinion to accept of an honour directly derived from the source of honour, and neither begged nor bought, as is the usual fashion. Several of my ancestors bore the title in the seventeenth century, and, were it of consequence, I have no reason to be ashamed of the decent and respectable persons who connect me with that period when they carried into the field, like Madoc,

> "The Crescent at whose gleam the Cambrian oft,
> Cursing his perilous tenure, wound his horn."

so that, as a gentleman, I may stand on as good a footing as other new creations." [1] Why the honour was any greater for coming from such a king as George, than it would have been if it had been suggested by Lord Sidmouth, or even Lord Liverpool,—or half as great as if Mr. Canning had proposed it, it is not easy to conceive. George was a fair judge of literary merit, but not one to

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, vi. 13, 14.

be compared for a moment with that great orator and wit; and as to his being the fountain of honour, there was so much dishonour of which the king was certainly the fountain too, that I do not think it was very easy for two fountains both springing from such a person to have flowed quite unmingled. George justly prided himself on Sir Walter Scott's having been the first creation of his reign, and I think the event showed that the poet was the fountain of much more honour for the king, than the king was for the poet.

When George came to Edinburgh in 1822, it was Sir Walter who acted virtually as the master of the ceremonies, and to whom it was chiefly due that the visit was so successful. It was then that George clad his substantial person for the first time in the Highland costume—to wit, in the Steuart Tartans—and was so much annoyed to find himself outvied by a wealthy alderman, Sir William Curtis, who had gone and done likewise, and, in his equally grand Steuart Tartans, seemed a kind of parody of the king. The day on which the king arrived, Tuesday, 14th of August, 1822, was also the day on which Scott's most intimate friend, William Erskine, then Lord Kinnedder, died. Yet Scott went on board the royal yacht, was most graciously received by George, had his health drunk by the king in a bottle of Highland whiskey, and with a proper show of devoted loyalty entreated to be allowed to retain the glass out of which his Majesty had just drunk his health. The request was graciously acceded to, but let it be pleaded on Scott's behalf, that on reaching home and finding there his friend Crabbe the poet, he sat down on the royal gift, and crushed it to atoms. One would hope that he was really thinking more even of Crabbe, and much more of Erskine, than of the royal

favour for which he had appeared, and doubtless had really believed himself, so grateful. Sir Walter retained his regard for the king, such as it was, to the last, and even persuaded himself that George's death would be a great political calamity for the nation. And really I cannot help thinking that Scott believed more in the king, than he did in his friend George Canning. Assuredly, greatly as he admired Canning, he condemned him more and more as Canning grew more liberal, and sometimes speaks of his veerings in that direction with positive asperity. George, on the other hand, who believed more in number one than in any other number, however large, became much more conservative after he became Regent than he was before, and as he grew more conservative Scott grew more conservative likewise, till he came to think this particular king almost a pillar of the Constitution. I suppose we ought to explain this little bit of fetish-worship in Scott much as we should the quaint practical adhesion to duelling which he gave as an old man, who had had all his life much more to do with the pen than the sword—that is, as an evidence of the tendency of an improved type to recur to that of the old wild stock on which it had been grafted. But certainly no feudal devotion of his ancestors to their chief was ever less justified by moral qualities than Scott's loyal devotion to the fountain of honour as embodied in "our fat friend." The whole relation to George was a grotesque thread in Scott's life; and I cannot quite forgive him for the utterly conventional severity with which he threw over his first patron, the Queen, for sins which were certainly not grosser, if they were not much less gross, than those of his second patron, the husband who had set her the example which she faithfully, though at a distance, followed.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### SCOTT AS A POLITICIAN.

Scott usually professed great ignorance of politics, and did what he could to hold aloof from a world in which his feelings were very easily heated, while his knowledge was apt to be very imperfect. But now and again, and notably towards the close of his life, he got himself mixed up in politics, and I need hardly say that it was always on the Tory, and generally on the red-hot Tory, side. His first hasty intervention in politics was the song I have just referred to on Lord Melville's acquittal, during the short Whig administration of 1806. In fact Scott's comparative abstinence from politics was due, I believe, chiefly to the fact that during almost the whole of his literary life, Tories and not Whigs were in power. No sooner was any reform proposed, any abuse threatened, than Scott's eager Conservative spirit flashed up. Proposals were made in 1806 for changes—and, as it was thought, reforms—in the Scotch Courts of Law, and Scott immediately saw something like national calamity in the prospect. The mild proposals in question were discussed at a meeting of the Faculty of Advocates, when Scott made a speech longer than he had ever before delivered, and animated by a "flow and energy of eloquence" for which those who were accustomed to hear his debating speeches were quite unprepared. He

walked home between two of the reformers, Mr. Jeffrey and another, when his companions began to compliment him on his eloquence, and to speak playfully of its subject. But Scott was in no mood for playfulness. "No, no," he exclaimed, "'tis no laughing matter; little by little, whatever your wishes may be, you will destroy and undermine, until nothing of what makes Scotland Scotland shall remain!" "And so saying," adds Mr. Lockhart, "he turned round to conceal his agitation, but not until Mr. Jeffrey saw tears gushing down his cheek,—resting his head, until he recovered himself, on the wall of the Mound."[1] It was the same strong feeling for old Scotch institutions which broke out so quaintly in the midst of his own worst troubles in 1826, on behalf of the Scotch banking-system, when he so eloquently defended, in the letters of *Malachi Malagrowther*, what would now be called Home-Rule for Scotland, and indeed really defeated the attempt of his friends the Tories, who were the innovators this time, to encroach on those sacred institutions—the Scotch one-pound note, and the private-note circulation of the Scotch banks. But when I speak of Scott as a Home-Ruler, I should add that had not Scotland been for generations governed to a great extent, and, as he thought successfully, by Home-Rule, he was far too good a Conservative to have apologized for it at all. The basis of his Conservatism was always the danger of undermining a system which had answered so well. In the concluding passages of the letters to which I have just referred, he contrasts "Theory, a scroll in her hand, full of deep and mysterious combinations of figures, the least failure in any one of which may alter the result entirely," with

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, ii. 328.

"a practical system successful for upwards of a century." His vehement and unquailing opposition to Reform in almost the very last year of his life, when he had already suffered more than one stroke of paralysis, was grounded on precisely the same argument. At Jedburgh, on the 21st March, 1831, he appeared in the midst of an angry population (who hooted and jeered at him till he turned round fiercely upon them with the defiance, "I regard your gabble no more than the geese on the green,") to urge the very same protest. "We in this district," he said, "are proud, and with reason, that the first chain-bridge was the work of a Scotchman. It still hangs where he erected it a pretty long time ago. The French heard of our invention, and determined to introduce it, but with great improvements and embellishments. A friend of my own saw the thing tried. It was on the Seine at Marly. The French chain-bridge looked lighter and airier than the prototype. Every Englishman present was disposed to confess that we had been beaten at our own trade. But by-and-by the gates were opened, and the multitude were to pass over. It began to swing rather formidably beneath the pressure of the good company; and by the time the architect, who led the procession in great pomp and glory, reached the middle, the whole gave way, and he—worthy, patriotic artist—was the first that got a ducking. They had forgot the middle bolt,—or rather this ingenious person had conceived that to be a clumsy-looking feature, which might safely be dispensed with, while he put some invisible gimcrack of his own to supply its place."[1] It is strange that Sir Walter did not see that this kind of criticism, so far as it

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, x. 47.

applied at all to such an experiment as the Reform Bill, was even more in point as a rebuke to the rashness of the Scotch reformer who hung the first successful chain-bridge, than to the rashness of the French reformer of reform who devised an unsuccessful variation on it. The audacity of the first experiment was much the greater, though the competence of the person who made it was the greater also. And as a matter of fact, the political structure against the supposed insecurity of which Sir Walter was protesting, with all the courage of that dauntless though dying nature, was made by one who understood his work at least as well as the Scotch architect. The tramp of the many multitudes who have passed over it has never yet made it to "swing dangerously," and Lord Russell in the fulness of his age was but yesterday rejoicing in what he had achieved, and even in what those have achieved who have altered his work in the same spirit in which he designed it.

But though Sir Walter persuaded himself that his Conservatism was all founded in legitimate distrust of reckless change, there is evidence, I think, that at times at least it was due to elements less noble. The least creditable incident in the story of his political life—which Mr. Lockhart, with his usual candour, did not conceal—was the bitterness with which he resented a most natural and reasonable Parliamentary opposition to an appointment which he had secured for his favourite brother, Tom. In 1810 Scott appointed his brother Tom, who had failed as a Writer to the Signet, to a place vacant under himself as Clerk of Session. He had not given him the best place vacant, because he thought it his duty to appoint an official who had grown grey in the service, but he gave Tom Scott this man's place, which was worth about 250*l.* a year. In the meantime Tom Scott's affairs did not

render it convenient for him to be come-at-able, and he absented himself, while they were being settled, in the Isle of Man. Further, the Commission on the Scotch system of judicature almost immediately reported that his office was one of supererogation, and ought to be abolished; but, to soften the blow, they proposed to allow him a pension of 130*l.* per annum. This proposal was discussed with some natural jealousy in the House of Lords. Lord Lauderdale thought that when Tom Scott was appointed, it must have been pretty evident that the Commission would propose to abolish his office, and that the appointment therefore should not have been made. "Mr. Thomas Scott," he said, "would have 130*l.* for life as an indemnity for an office the duties of which he never had performed, while those clerks who had laboured for twenty years had no adequate remuneration." Lord Holland supported this very reasonable and moderate view of the case; but of course the Ministry carried their way, and Tom Scott got his unearned pension. Nevertheless, Scott was furious with Lord Holland. Writing soon after to the happy recipient of this little pension, he says, "Lord Holland has been in Edinburgh, and we met accidentally at a public party. He made up to me, but I remembered his part in your affair, and *cut* him with as little remorse as an old pen." Mr. Lockhart says, on Lord Jeffrey's authority, that the scene was a very painful one. Lord Jeffrey himself declared that it was the only rudeness of which he ever saw Scott guilty in the course of a life-long familiarity. And it is pleasant to know that he renewed his cordiality with Lord Holland in later years, though there is no evidence that he ever admitted that he had been in the wrong. But the incident shows how very doubtful Sir Walter ought to have felt as to the purity

of his Conservatism. It is quite certain that the proposal to abolish Tom Scott's office without compensation was not a reckless experiment of a fundamental kind. It was a mere attempt at diminishing the heavy burdens laid on the people for the advantage of a small portion of the middle class, and yet Scott resented it with as much display of selfish passion—considering his genuine nobility of breeding—as that with which the rude working men of Jedburgh afterwards resented his gallant protest against the Reform Bill, and, later again, saluted the dauntless old man with the dastardly cry of "Burk Sir Walter!" Judged truly, I think Sir Walter's conduct in cutting Lord Holland "with as little remorse as an old pen," for simply doing his duty in the House of Lords, was quite as ignoble in him as the bullying and insolence of the democratic party in 1831, when the dying lion made his last dash at what he regarded as the foes of the Constitution. Doubtless he held that the mob, or, as we more decorously say, the residuum, were in some sense the enemies of true freedom. "I cannot read in history," he writes once to Mr. Laidlaw, "of any free State which has been brought to slavery till the rascal and uninstructed populace had had their short hour of anarchical government, which naturally leads to the stern repose of military despotism." But he does not seem ever to have perceived that educated men identify themselves with "the rascal and uninstructed populace," whenever they indulge on behalf of the selfish interests of their own class, passions such as he had indulged in fighting for his brother's pension. It is not the want of instruction, it is the rascaldom, i. e. the violent *esprit de corps* of a selfish class, which "naturally leads" to violent remedies. Such rascaldom exists in all classes, and not

least in the class of the cultivated and refined. Generous and magnanimous as Scott was, he was evidently by no means free from the germs of it.

One more illustration of Scott's political Conservatism, and I may leave his political life, which was not indeed his strong side, though, as with all sides of Scott's nature, it had an energy and spirit all his own. On the subject of Catholic Emancipation he took a peculiar view. As he justly said, he hated bigotry, and would have left the Catholics quite alone, but for the great claims of their creed to interfere with political life. And even so, when the penal laws were once abolished, he would have abolished also the representative disabilities, as quite useless, as well as very irritating when the iron system of effective repression had ceased. But he disapproved of the abolition of the political parts of the penal laws. He thought they would have stamped out Roman Catholicism; and whether that were just or unjust, he thought it would have been a great national service. "As for Catholic Emancipation," he wrote to Southey in 1807, "I am not, God knows, a bigot in religious matters, nor a friend to persecution; but if a particular set of religionists are *ipso facto* connected with foreign politics, and placed under the spiritual direction of a class of priests, whose unrivalled dexterity and activity are increased by the rules which detach them from the rest of the world—I humbly think that we may be excused from entrusting to them those places in the State where the influence of such a clergy, who act under the direction of a passive tool of our worst foe, is likely to be attended with the most fatal consequences. If a gentleman chooses to walk about with a couple of pounds of gunpowder in his pocket, if I give him the shelter of my roof, I may at least be permitted

to exclude him from the seat next to the fire." [1] And in relation to the year 1825, when Scott visited Ireland, Mr. Lockhart writes, "He on all occasions expressed manfully his belief that the best thing for Ireland would have been never to relax the strictly *political* enactments of the penal laws, however harsh these might appear. Had they been kept in vigour for another half-century, it was his conviction that Popery would have been all but extinguished in Ireland. But he thought that after admitting Romanists to the elective franchise, it was a vain notion that they could be permanently or advantageously deterred from using that franchise in favour of those of their own persuasion."

In his diary in 1829 he puts the same view still more strongly:—"I cannot get myself to feel at all anxious about the Catholic question. I cannot see the use of fighting about the platter, when you have let them snatch the meat off it. I hold Popery to be such a mean and degrading superstition, that I am not sure I could have found myself liberal enough for voting the repeal of the penal laws as they existed before 1780. They must and would, in course of time, have smothered Popery; and I confess that I should have seen the old lady of Babylon's mouth stopped with pleasure. But now that you have taken the plaster off her mouth, and given her free respiration, I cannot see the sense of keeping up the irritation about the claim to sit in Parliament. Unopposed, the Catholic superstition may sink into dust, with all its absurd ritual and solemnities. Still it is an awful risk. The world is in fact as silly as ever, and a good competence of nonsense will always find believers." [2] That is

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, iii. 34.
[2] Ibid., ix. 305.

the view of a strong and rather unscrupulous politician —a moss-trooper in politics —which Scott certainly was. He was thinking evidently very little of justice, almost entirely of the most effective means of keeping the Kingdom, the Kingdom which he loved. Had he understood—what none of the politicians of that day understood—the strength of the Church of Rome as the only consistent exponent of the principle of Authority in religion, I believe his opposition to Catholic emancipation would have been as bitter as his opposition to Parliamentary reform. But he took for granted that while only "silly" persons believed in Rome, and only "infidels" rejected an authoritative creed altogether, it was quite easy by the exercise of common sense, to find the true compromise between reason and religious humility. Had Scott lived through the religious controversies of our own days, it seems not unlikely that with his vivid imagination, his warm Conservatism, and his rather inadequate critical powers, he might himself have become a Roman Catholic.

## CHAPTER XV.

### SCOTT IN ADVERSITY.

WITH the year 1825 came a financial crisis, and Constable began to tremble for his solvency. From the date of his baronetcy Sir Walter had launched out into a considerable increase of expenditure. He got plans on a rather large scale in 1821 for the increase of Abbotsford, which were all carried out. To meet his expenses in this and other ways he received Constable's bills for "four unnamed works of fiction," of which he had not written a line, but which came to exist in time, and were called *Peveril of the Peak*, *Quentin Durward*, *St. Ronan's Well*, and *Redgauntlet*. Again, in the very year before the crash, 1825, he married his eldest son, the heir to the title, to a young lady who was herself an heiress, Miss Jobson of Lochore, when Abbotsford and its estates were settled, with the reserve of 10,000*l.*, which Sir Walter took power to charge on the property for purposes of business. Immediately afterwards he purchased a captaincy in the King's Hussars for his son, which cost him 3500*l.* Nor were the obligations he incurred on his own account, or that of his family, the only ones by which he was burdened. He was always incurring expenses, often heavy expenses, for other people. Thus, when Mr. Terry, the actor, became joint lessee and manager of the Adelphi

Theatre, London, Scott became his surety for 1250*l.*, while James Ballantyne became his surety for 500*l.* more, and both these sums had to be paid by Sir Walter after Terry's failure in 1828. Such obligations as these, however, would have been nothing when compared with Sir Walter's means, had all his bills on Constable been duly honoured, and had not the printing firm of Ballantyne and Co. been so deeply involved with Constable's house that it necessarily became insolvent when he stopped. Taken altogether, I believe that Sir Walter earned during his own lifetime at least 140,000*l.* by his literary work alone, probably more; while even on his land and building combined he did not apparently spend more than half that sum. Then he had a certain income, about 1000*l.* a year, from his own and Lady Scott's private property, as well as 1300*l.* a year as Clerk of Session, and 300*l.* more as Sheriff of Selkirk. Thus even his loss of the price of several novels by Constable's failure would not seriously have compromised Scott's position, but for his share in the printing-house which fell with Constable, and the obligations of which amounted to 117,000*l.*

As Scott had always forestalled his income,—spending the purchase-money of his poems and novels before they were written,—such a failure as this, at the age of fifty-five, when all the freshness of his youth was gone out of him, when he saw his son's prospects blighted as well as his own, and knew perfectly that James Ballantyne, unassisted by him, could never hope to pay any fraction of the debt worth mentioning, would have been paralysing, had he not been a man of iron nerve, and of a pride and courage hardly ever equalled. Domestic calamity, too, was not far off. For two years he had been watching the failure of his wife's health with in-

creasing anxiety, and as calamities seldom come single, her illness took a most serious form at the very time when the blow fell, and she died within four months of the failure. Nay, Scott was himself unwell at the critical moment, and was taking sedatives which discomposed his brain. Twelve days before the final failure,—which was announced to him on the 17th January, 1826,—he enters in his diary, "Much alarmed. I had walked till twelve with Skene and Russell, and then sat down to my work. To my horror and surprise I could neither write nor spell, but put down one word for another, and wrote nonsense. I was much overpowered at the same time and could not conceive the reason. I fell asleep, however, in my chair, and slept for two hours. On my waking my head was clearer, and I began to recollect that last night I had taken the anodyne left for the purpose by Clarkson, and being disturbed in the course of the night, I had not slept it off." In fact the hyoscyamus had, combined with his anxieties, given him a slight attack of what is now called *aphasia*, that brain disease the most striking symptom of which is that one word is mistaken for another. And this was Scott's preparation for his failure, and the bold resolve which followed it, to work for his creditors as he had worked for himself, and to pay off, if possible, the whole 117,000*l.* by his own literary exertions.

There is nothing in its way in the whole of English biography more impressive than the stoical extracts from Scott's diary which note the descent of this blow. Here is the anticipation of the previous day: "Edinburgh, January 16th.—Came through cold roads to as cold news. Hurst and Robinson have suffered a bill to come back upon Constable, which, I suppose, infers the ruin of both houses.

We shall soon see. Dined with the Skenes." And here is the record itself: "January 17th.—James Ballantyne this morning, good honest fellow, with a visage as black as the crook. He hopes no salvation; has, indeed, taken measures to stop. It is hard, after having fought such a battle. I have apologized for not attending the Royal Society Club, who have a *gaudeamus* on this day, and seemed to count much on my being the præses. My old acquaintance Miss Elizabeth Clerk, sister of Willie, died suddenly. I cannot choose but wish it had been Sir W. S., and yet the feeling is unmanly. I have Anne, my wife, and Charles to look after. I felt rather sneaking as I came home from the Parliament-house—felt as if I were liable *monstrari digito* in no very pleasant way. But this must be borne *cum cæteris;* and, thank God, however uncomfortable, I do not feel despondent."[1] On the following day, the 18th January, the day after the blow, he records a bad night, a wish that the next two days were over, but that "the worst *is* over," and on the same day he set about making notes for the *magnum opus*, as he called it—the complete edition of all the novels, with a new introduction and notes. On the 19th January, two days after the failure, he calmly resumed the composition of *Woodstock*—the novel on which he was then engaged—and completed, he says, "about twenty printed pages of it;" to which he adds that he had "a painful scene after dinner and another after supper, endeavouring to convince these poor creatures" [his wife and daughter] "that they must not look for miracles, but consider the misfortune as certain, and only to be lessened by patience and labour." On the 21st January, after a

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, viii. 197.

number of business details, he quotes from Job, "Naked we entered the world and naked we leave it; blessed be the name of the Lord." On the 22nd he says, "I feel neither dishonoured nor broken down by the bad, now truly bad, news I have received. I have walked my last in the domains I have planted—sat the last time in the halls I have built. But death would have taken them from me, if misfortune had spared them. My poor people whom I loved so well! There is just another die to turn up against me in this run of ill-luck, i. e. if I should break my magic wand in the fall from this elephant, and lose my popularity with my fortune. Then *Woodstock* and *Boney*" [his life of Napoleon] "may both go to the paper-maker, and I may take to smoking cigars and drinking grog, or turn devotee and intoxicate the brain another way."[1] He adds that when he sets to work doggedly, he is exactly the same man he ever was, "neither low-spirited nor *distrait*," nay, that adversity is to him "a tonic and bracer."

The heaviest blow was, I think, the blow to his pride. Very early he begins to note painfully the different way in which different friends greet him, to remark that some smile as if to say, "think nothing about it, my lad, it is quite out of our thoughts;" that others adopt an affected gravity, "such as one sees and despises at a funeral," and the best-bred "just shook hands and went on." He writes to Mr. Morritt with a proud indifference, clearly to some extent simulated:—"My womenkind will be the greater sufferers, yet even they look cheerily forward; and, for myself, the blowing off of my hat on a stormy day has given me more uneasiness."[2] To Lady Davy he writes

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, viii. 203-4.
[2] Ibid., viii. 235.

truly enough:—"I beg my humblest compliments to Sir Humphrey, and tell him, Ill Luck, that direful chemist, never put into his crucible a more indissoluble piece of stuff than your affectionate cousin and sincere well-wisher, Walter Scott."[1] When his *Letters of Malachi Malagrowther* came out he writes:—"I am glad of this bruilzie, as far as I am concerned; people will not dare talk of me as an object of pity—no more 'poor-manning.' Who asks how many punds Scots the old champion had in his pocket when

> 'He set a bugle to his mouth,
> And blew so loud and shrill,
> The trees in greenwood shook thereat,
> Sae loud rang every hill.'

This sounds conceited enough, yet is not far from truth."[2] His dread of pity is just the same when his wife dies:—"Will it be better," he writes, "when left to my own feelings, I see the whole world pipe and dance around me? I think it will. Their sympathy intrudes on my present affliction." Again, on returning for the first time from Edinburgh to Abbotsford after Lady Scott's funeral:—"I again took possession of the family bedroom and my widowed couch. This was a sore trial, but it was necessary not to blink such a resolution. Indeed I do not like to have it thought that there is any way in which I can be beaten." And again:—"I have a secret pride—I fancy it will be so most truly termed—which impels me to mix with my distresses strange snatches of mirth, 'which have no mirth in them.'"[3]

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, viii. 238.
[2] viii. 277.
[3] viii., 347, 371, 381.

But though pride was part of Scott's strength, pride alone never enabled any man to struggle so vigorously and so unremittingly as he did to meet the obligations he had incurred. When he was in Ireland in the previous year, a poor woman who had offered to sell him gooseberries, but whose offer had not been accepted, remarked, on seeing his daughter give some pence to a beggar, that they might as well give her an alms too, as she was "an old struggler." Sir Walter was struck with the expression, and said that it deserved to become classical, as a name for those who take arms against a sea of troubles, instead of yielding to the waves. It was certainly a name the full meaning of which he himself deserved. His house in Edinburgh was sold, and he had to go into a certain Mrs. Brown's lodgings, when he was discharging his duties as Clerk of Session. His wife was dead. His estate was conveyed to trustees for the benefit of his creditors till such time as he should pay off Ballantyne and Co's. debt, which of course in his lifetime he never did. Yet between January, 1826, and January, 1828, he earned for his creditors very nearly 40,000*l.* *Woodstock* sold for 8228*l.*, "a matchless sale," as Sir Walter remarked, "for less than three months' work." The first two editions of *The Life of Napoleon Bonaparte*, on which Mr. Lockhart says that Scott had spent the unremitting labour of about two years—labour involving a far greater strain on eyes and brain than his imaginative work ever caused him—sold for 18,000*l.* Had Sir Walter's health lasted, he would have redeemed his obligations on behalf of Ballantyne and Co. within eight or nine years at most from the time of his failure. But what is more remarkable still, is that after his health failed he struggled on with little more than half a brain,

but a whole will, to work while it was yet day, though the evening was dropping fast. *Count Robert of Paris* and *Castle Dangerous* were really the compositions of a paralytic patient.

It was in September, 1830, that the first of these tales was begun. As early as the 15th February of that year he had had his first true paralytic seizure. He had been discharging his duties as clerk of session as usual, and received in the afternoon a visit from a lady friend of his, Miss Young, who was submitting to him some manuscript memoirs of her father, when the stroke came. It was but slight. He struggled against it with his usual iron power of will, and actually managed to stagger out of the room where the lady was sitting with him, into the drawing-room where his daughter was, but there he fell his full length on the floor. He was cupped, and fully recovered his speech during the course of the day, but Mr. Lockhart thinks that never, after this attack, did his style recover its full lucidity and terseness. A cloudiness in words and a cloudiness of arrangement began to be visible. In the course of the year he retired from his duties of clerk of session, and his publishers hoped that, by engaging him on the new and complete edition of his works, they might detach him from the attempt at imaginative creation for which he was now so much less fit. But Sir Walter's will survived his judgment. When, in the previous year, Ballantyne had been disabled from attending to business by his wife's illness (which ended in her death), Scott had written in his diary, "It is his (Ballantyne's) nature to indulge apprehensions of the worst which incapacitate him for labour. I cannot help regarding this amiable weakness of the mind with something too nearly allied to contempt," and assuredly he

was guilty of no such weakness himself. Not only did he row much harder against the stream of fortune than he had ever rowed with it, but, what required still more resolution, he fought on against the growing conviction that his imagination would not kindle, as it used to do, to its old heat.

When he dictated to Laidlaw,—for at this time he could hardly write himself for rheumatism in the hand,—he would frequently pause and look round him, like a man "mocked with shadows." Then he bestirred himself with a great effort, rallied his force, and the style again flowed clear and bright, but not for long. The clouds would gather again, and the mental blank recur. This soon became visible to his publishers, who wrote discouragingly of the new novel—to Scott's own great distress and irritation. The oddest feature in the matter was that his letters to them were full of the old terseness, and force, and caustic turns. On business he was as clear and keen as in his best days. It was only at his highest task, the task of creative work, that his cunning began to fail him. Here, for instance, are a few sentences written to Cadell, his publisher, touching this very point—the discouragement which James Ballantyne had been pouring on the new novel. Ballantyne, he says, finds fault with the subject, when what he really should have found fault with was the failing power of the author:—"James is, with many other kindly critics, perhaps in the predicament of an honest drunkard, when crop-sick the next morning, who does not ascribe the malady to the wine he has drunk, but to having tasted some particular dish at dinner which disagreed with his stomach. . . . . I have lost, it is plain, the power of interesting the country, and ought, in justice to all parties, to retire while I have some credit.

But this is an important step, and I will not be obstinate about it if it be necessary. . . . . Frankly, I cannot think of flinging aside the half-finished volume, as if it were a corked bottle of wine. . . . . I may, perhaps, take a trip to the Continent for a year or two, if I find Othello's occupation gone, or rather Othello's *reputation*."[1] And again, in a very able letter written on the 12th of December, 1830, to Cadell, he takes a view of the situation with as much calmness and imperturbability as if he were an outside spectator. "There were many circumstances in the matter which you and J. B. (James Ballantyne) could not be aware of, and which, if you were aware of, might have influenced your judgment, which had, and yet have, a most powerful effect upon mine. The deaths of both my father and mother have been preceded by a paralytic shock. My father survived it for nearly two years—a melancholy respite, and not to be desired. I was alarmed with Miss Young's morning visit, when, as you know, I lost my speech. The medical people said it was from the stomach, which might be, but while there is a doubt upon a point so alarming, you will not wonder that the subject, or to use Hare's *lingo*, the *shot*, should be a little anxious." He relates how he had followed all the strict medical *régime* prescribed to him with scrupulous regularity, and then begun his work again with as much attention as he could. "And having taken pains with my story, I find it is not relished, nor indeed tolerated, by those who have no interest in condemning it, but a strong interest in putting even a face" (? force) "upon their consciences. Was not this, in the circumstances, a damper to an invalid already

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott* x. 11, 12.

afraid that the sharp edge might be taken off his intellect, though he was not himself sensible of that?" In fact, no more masterly discussion of the question whether his mind were failing or not, and what he ought to do in the interval of doubt, can be conceived, than these letters give us. At this time the debt of Ballantyne and Co. had been reduced by repeated dividends—all the fruits of Scott's literary work—more than one half. On the 17th of December, 1830, the liabilities stood at 54,000*l.*, having been reduced 63,000*l.* within five years. And Sir Walter, encouraged by this great result of his labour, resumed the suspended novel.

But with the beginning of 1831 came new alarms. On January 5th Sir Walter enters in his diary,—"Very indifferent, with more awkward feelings than I can well bear up against. My voice sunk and my head strangely confused." Still he struggled on. On the 31st January he went alone to Edinburgh to sign his will, and stayed at his bookseller's (Cadell's) house in Athol Crescent. A great snow-storm set in which kept him in Edinburgh and in Mr. Cadell's house till the 9th February. One day while the snow was still falling heavily, Ballantyne reminded him that a motto was wanting for one of the chapters of *Count Robert of Paris*. He went to the window, looked out for a moment, and then wrote,—

> "The storm increases; 'tis no sunny shower,
> Foster'd in the moist breast of March or April,
> Or such as parchèd summer cools his lips with.
> Heaven's windows are flung wide; the inmost deeps
> Call, in hoarse greeting, one upon another;
> On comes the flood, in all its foaming horrors,
> And where's the dike shall stop it?
>
> *The Deluge: a Poem.*'

Clearly this failing imagination of Sir Walter's was still a great deal more vivid than that of most men, with brains as sound as it ever pleased Providence to make them. But his troubles were not yet even numbered. The "storm increased," and it was, as he said, "no sunny shower." His lame leg became so painful that he had to get a mechanical apparatus to relieve him of some of the burden of supporting it. Then, on the 21st March, he was hissed at Jedburgh, as I have before said, for his vehement opposition to Reform. In April he had another stroke of paralysis which he now himself recognized as one. Still he struggled on at his novel. Under the date of May 6, 7, 8, he makes this entry in his diary :—"Here is a precious job. I have a formal remonstrance from those critical people, Ballantyne and Cadell, against the last volume of *Count Robert*, which is within a sheet of being finished. I suspect their opinion will be found to coincide with that of the public; at least it is not very different from my own. The blow is a stunning one, I suppose, for I scarcely feel it. It is singular, but it comes with as little surprise as if I had a remedy ready; yet God knows I am at sea in the dark, and the vessel leaky, I think, into the bargain. I cannot conceive that I have tied a knot with my tongue which my teeth cannot untie. We shall see. I have suffered terribly, that is the truth, rather in body than mind, and I often wish I could lie down and sleep without waking. But I will fight it out if I can."[1] The medical men with one accord tried to make him give up his novel-writing. But he smiled and put them by. He took up *Count Robert of Paris* again, and tried to recast it. On the 18th May he insisted on

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, x. 65-6.

attending the election for Roxburghshire, to be held at Jedburgh, and in spite of the unmannerly reception he had met with in March, no dissuasion would keep him at home. He was saluted in the town with groans and blasphemies, and Sir Walter had to escape from Jedburgh by a back way to avoid personal violence. The cries of "Burk Sir Walter," with which he was saluted on this occasion, haunted him throughout his illness and on his dying bed. At the Selkirk election it was Sir Walter's duty as Sheriff to preside, and his family therefore made no attempt to dissuade him from his attendance. There he was so well known and loved, that in spite of his Tory views, he was not insulted, and the only man who made any attempt to hustle the Tory electors, was seized by Sir Walter with his own hand, as he got out of his carriage, and committed to prison without resistance till the election day was over.

A seton which had been ordered for his head, gave him some relief, and of course the first result was that he turned immediately to his novel-writing again, and began *Castle Dangerous* in July, 1831,—the last July but one which he was to see at all. He even made a little journey in company with Mr. Lockhart, in order to see the scene of the story he wished to tell, and on his return set to work with all his old vigour to finish his tale, and put the concluding touches to *Count Robert of Paris.* But his temper was no longer what it had been. He quarrelled with Ballantyne, partly for his depreciatory criticism of *Count Robert of Paris*, partly for his growing tendency to a mystic and strait-laced sort of dissent and his increasing Liberalism. Even Mr. Laidlaw and Scott's children had much to bear. But he struggled on even to the end, and did not consent to try the experiment of a

voyage and visit to Italy till his immediate work was done. Well might Lord Chief Baron Shepherd apply to Scott Cicero's description of some contemporary of his own, who "had borne adversity wisely, who had not been broken by fortune, and who, amidst the buffets of fate, had maintained his dignity." There was in Sir Walter, I think, at least as much of the Stoic as the Christian. But Stoic or Christian, he was a hero of the old, indomitable type. Even the last fragments of his imaginative power were all turned to account by that unconquerable will, amidst the discouragement of friends, and the still more disheartening doubts of his own mind. Like the headland stemming a rough sea, he was gradually worn away, but never crushed.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE LAST YEAR.

In the month of September, 1831, the disease of the brain which had long been in existence must have made a considerable step in advance. For the first time the illusion seemed to possess Sir Walter that he had paid off all the debt for which he was liable, and that he was once more free to give as his generosity prompted. Scott sent Mr. Lockhart 50*l.* to save his grandchildren some slight inconvenience, and told another of his correspondents that he had "put his decayed fortune into as good a condition as he could desire." It was well, therefore, that he had at last consented to try the effect of travel on his health,—not that he could hope to arrest by it such a disease as his, but that it diverted him from the most painful of all efforts, that of trying anew the spell which had at last failed him, and perceiving in the disappointed eyes of his old admirers that the magic of his imagination was a thing of the past. The last day of real enjoyment at Abbotsford—for when Sir Walter returned to it to die, it was but to catch once more the outlines of its walls, the rustle of its woods, and the gleam of its waters, through senses already darkened to all less familiar and less fascinating visions—was the 22nd September, 1831. On the 21st, Wordsworth had

come to bid his old friend adieu, and on the 22nd—the last day at home—they spent the morning together in a visit to Newark. It was a day to deepen alike in Scott and in Wordsworth whatever of sympathy either of them had with the very different genius of the other, and that it had this result in Wordsworth's case, we know from the very beautiful poem,—"Yarrow Revisited,"—and the sonnet which the occasion also produced. And even Scott, who was so little of a Wordsworthian, who enjoyed Johnson's stately but formal verse, and Crabbe's vivid Dutch painting, more than he enjoyed the poetry of the transcendental school, must have recurred that day with more than usual emotion to his favourite Wordsworthian poem. Soon after his wife's death, he had remarked in his diary how finely "the effect of grief upon persons who like myself are highly susceptible of humour" had been "touched by Wordsworth in the character of the merry village teacher, Matthew, whom Jeffrey profanely calls a half-crazy, sentimental person."[1] And long before this time, during the brightest period of his life, Scott had made the old Antiquary of his novel quote the same poem of Wordsworth's, in a passage where the period of life at which he had now arrived is anticipated with singular pathos and force. "It is at such moments as these," says Mr. Oldbuck, "that we feel the changes of time. The same objects are before us—those inanimate things which we have gazed on in wayward infancy and impetuous youth, in anxious and scheming manhood—they are permanent and the same; but when we look upon them in cold, unfeeling old age, can we, changed in our temper, our pursuits, our feelings,—changed in our form, our limbs, and our strength,—can we be ourselves called the

[1] Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, ix. 63.

same? or do we not rather look back with a sort of wonder upon our former selves as beings separate and distinct from what we now are? The philosopher who appealed from Philip inflamed with wine to Philip in his hours of sobriety, did not claim a judge so different as if he had appealed from Philip in his youth to Philip in his old age. I cannot but be touched with the feeling so beautifully expressed in a poem which I have heard repeated:—

> 'My eyes are dim with childish tears,
> My heart is idly stirr'd,
> For the same sound is in my ears
> Which in those days I heard.
> Thus fares it still in our decay,
> And yet the wiser mind
> Mourns less for what age takes away
> Than what it leaves behind.' " [1]

Sir Walter's memory, which, in spite of the slight failure of brain and the mild illusions to which, on the subject of his own prospects, he was now liable, had as yet been little impaired—indeed, he could still quote whole pages from all his favourite authors—must have recurred to those favourite Wordsworthian lines of his with singular force, as, with Wordsworth for his companion, he gazed on the refuge of the last Minstrel of his imagination for the last time, and felt in himself how much of joy in the sight, age had taken away, and how much, too, of the habit of expecting it, it had unfortunately left behind. Whether Sir Walter recalled this poem of Wordsworth's on this occasion or not—and if he recalled it, his delight in giving pleasure would assuredly have led him to let Wordsworth know that he recalled it—the mood it paints was unquestionably that in which his last day at Abbotsford

[1] *The Antiquary*, chap. x.

was passed. In the evening, referring to the journey which was to begin the next day, he remarked that Fielding and Smollett had been driven abroad by declining health, and that they had never returned; while Wordsworth—willing perhaps to bring out a brighter feature in the present picture—regretted that the last days of those two great novelists had not been surrounded by due marks of respect. With Sir Walter, as he well knew, it was different. The Liberal Government that he had so bitterly opposed were pressing on him signs of the honour in which he was held, and a ship of his Majesty's navy had been placed at his disposal to take him to the Mediterranean. And Wordsworth himself added his own more durable token of reverence. As long as English poetry lives, Englishmen will know something of that last day of the last Minstrel at Newark:—

"Grave thoughts ruled wide on that sweet day,
Their dignity installing
In gentle bosoms, while sere leaves
Were on the bough or falling;
But breezes play'd, and sunshine gleam'd
The forest to embolden,
Redden'd the fiery hues, and shot
Transparence through the golden.

"For busy thoughts the stream flow'd on
In foamy agitation;
And slept in many a crystal pool
For quiet contemplation:
No public and no private care
The free-born mind enthralling,
We made a day of happy hours,
Our happy days recalling.

* * * *

"And if, as Yarrow through the woods
And down the meadow ranging,
Did meet us with unalter'd face,
Though we were changed and changing;

If *then* some natural shadow spread
Our inward prospect over,
The soul's deep valley was not slow
Its brightness to recover.

"Eternal blessings on the Muse
And her divine employment,
The blameless Muse who trains her sons
For hope and calm enjoyment;
Albeit sickness lingering yet
Has o'er their pillow brooded,
And care waylays their steps—a sprite
Not easily eluded.

* * * * *

"Nor deem that localized Romance
Plays false with our affections;
Unsanctifies our tears—made sport
For fanciful dejections:
Ah, no! the visions of the past
Sustain the heart in feeling
Life as she is—our changeful Life
With friends and kindred dealing.

"Bear witness ye, whose thoughts that day
In Yarrow's groves were centred,
Who through the silent portal arch
Of mouldering Newark enter'd;
And clomb the winding stair that once
Too timidly was mounted
By the last Minstrel—not the last!—
Ere he his tale recounted."

Thus did the meditative poetry, the day of which was not yet, do honour to itself in doing homage to the Minstrel of romantic energy and martial enterprise, who, with the school of poetry he loved, was passing away.

On the 23rd September Scott left Abbotsford, spending five days on his journey to London; nor would he allow any of the old objects of interest to be passed with-

out getting out of the carriage to see them. He did not leave London for Portsmouth till the 23rd October, but spent the intervening time in London, where he took medical advice, and with his old shrewdness wheeled his chair into a dark corner during the physicians' absence from the room to consult, that he might read their faces clearly on their return without their being able to read his. They recognized traces of brain disease, but Sir Walter was relieved by their comparatively favourable opinion, for he admitted that he had feared insanity, and therefore had "feared *them*." On the 29th October he sailed for Malta, and on the 20th November Sir Walter insisted on being landed on a small volcanic island which had appeared four months previously, and which disappeared again in a few days, and on clambering about its crumbling lava, in spite of sinking at nearly every step almost up to his knees, in order that he might send a description of it to his old friend Mr. Skene. On the 22nd November he reached Malta, where he looked eagerly at the antiquities of the place, for he still hoped to write a novel—and, indeed, actually wrote one at Naples, which was never published, called *The Siege of Malta*—on the subject of the Knights of Malta, who had interested him so much in his youth. From Malta Scott went to Naples, which he reached on the 17th December, and where he found much pleasure in the society of Sir William Gell, an invalid like himself, but not one who, like himself, struggled against the admission of his infirmities, and refused to be carried when his own legs would not safely carry him. Sir William Gell's dog delighted the old man; he would pat it and call it "Poor boy!" and confide to Sir William how he had at home "two very fine favourite dogs, so large that I am always afraid they look too large

and too feudal for my diminished income." In all his letters home he gave some injunction to Mr. Laidlaw about the poor people and the dogs.

On the 22nd of March, 1832, Goethe died, an event which made a great impression on Scott, who had intended to visit Weimar on his way back, on purpose to see Goethe, and this much increased his eager desire to return home. Accordingly on the 16th of April, the last day on which he made any entry in his diary, he quitted Naples for Rome, where he stayed long enough only to let his daughter see something of the place, and hurried off homewards on the 21st of May. In Venice he was still strong enough to insist on scrambling down into the dungeons adjoining the Bridge of Sighs; and at Frankfort he entered a bookseller's shop, when the man brought out a lithograph of Abbotsford, and Scott remarking, "I know that already, sir," left the shop unrecognized, more than ever craving for home. At Nimeguen, on the 9th of June, while in a steamboat on the Rhine, he had his most serious attack of apoplexy, but would not discontinue his journey, was lifted into an English steamboat at Rotterdam on the 11th of June, and arrived in London on the 13th. There he recognized his children, and appeared to expect immediate death, as he gave them repeatedly his most solemn blessing, but for the most part he lay at the St. James's Hotel, in Jermyn Street, without any power to converse. There it was that Allan Cunningham, on walking home one night, found a group of working men at the corner of the street, who stopped him and asked, "as if there was but one death-bed in London, 'Do you know, sir, if this is the street where he is lying?'" According to the usual irony of destiny, it was while the working men were doing him this hearty and

unconscious homage, that Sir Walter, whenever disturbed by the noises of the street, imagined himself at the polling-booth of Jedburgh, where the people had cried out, "Burk Sir Walter." And it was while lying here,—only now and then uttering a few words,—that Mr. Lockhart says of him, "He expressed his will as determinedly as ever, and expressed it with the same apt and good-natured irony that he was wont to use."

Sir Walter's great and urgent desire was to return to Abbotsford, and at last his physicians yielded. On the 7th July he was lifted into his carriage, followed by his trembling and weeping daughters, and so taken to a steamboat, where the captain gave up his private cabin—a cabin on deck—for his use. He remained unconscious of any change till after his arrival in Edinburgh, when, on the 11th July, he was placed again in his carriage, and remained in it quite unconscious during the first two stages of the journey to Tweedside. But as the carriage entered the valley of the Gala, he began to look about him. Presently he murmured a name or two, "Gala water, surely,—Buckholm,—Torwoodlee." When the outline of the Eildon hills came in view, Scott's excitement was great, and when his eye caught the towers of Abbotsford, he sprang up with a cry of delight, and while the towers remained in sight it took his physician, his son-in-law, and his servant, to keep him in the carriage. Mr. Laidlaw was waiting for him, and he met him with a cry, "Ha! Willie Laidlaw! O, man, how often I have thought of you!" His dogs came round his chair and began to fawn on him and lick his hands, while Sir Walter smiled or sobbed over them. The next morning he was wheeled about his garden, and on the following morning was out in this way for a couple of hours; within a day or two he

fancied that he could write again, but on taking the pen into his hand, his fingers could not clasp it, and he sank back with tears rolling down his cheek. Later, when Laidlaw said in his hearing that Sir Walter had had a little repose, he replied, "No, Willie; no repose for Sir Walter but in the grave." As the tears rushed from his eyes, his old pride revived. "Friends," he said, "don't let me expose myself—get me to bed,—that is the only place."

After this Sir Walter never left his room. Occasionally he dropped off into delirium, and the old painful memory,—that cry of "Burk Sir Walter,"—might be again heard on his lips. He lingered, however, till the 21st September,—more than two months from the day of his reaching home, and a year from the day of Wordsworth's arrival at Abbotsford before his departure for the Mediterranean, with only one clear interval of consciousness, on Monday, the 17th September. On that day Mr. Lockhart was called to Sir Walter's bedside with the news that he had awakened in a state of composure and consciousness, and wished to see him. "'Lockhart,' he said, 'I may have but a minute to speak to you. My dear, be a good man,—be virtuous,—be religious,—be a good man. Nothing else will give you any comfort when you come to lie here.' He paused, and I said, 'Shall I send for Sophia and Anne?' 'No,' said he, 'don't disturb them. Poor souls! I know they were up all night. God bless you all!'" With this he sank into a very tranquil sleep, and, indeed, he scarcely afterwards gave any sign of consciousness except for an instant on the arrival of his sons. And so four days afterwards, on the day of the autumnal equinox in 1832, at half-past one in the afternoon, on a glorious autumn day, with every window wide open, and the ripple of the Tweed over its

pebbles distinctly audible in his room, he passed away, and "his eldest son kissed and closed his eyes." He died a month after completing his sixty-first year. Nearly seven years earlier, on the 7th December, 1825, he had in his diary taken a survey of his own health in relation to the age reached by his father and other members of his family, and had stated as the result of his considerations, "Square the odds and good night, Sir Walter, about sixty. I care not if I leave my name unstained and my family property settled. *Sat est vixisse.*" Thus he lived just a year—but a year of gradual death—beyond his own calculation.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE END OF THE STRUGGLE.

Sir Walter certainly left his "name unstained," unless the serious mistakes natural to a sanguine temperament such as his, are to be counted as stains upon his name; and if they are, where among the sons of men would you find many unstained names as noble as his with such a stain upon it? He was not only sensitively honourable in motive, but, when he found what evil his sanguine temper had worked, he used his gigantic powers to repair it, as Samson used his great strength to repair the mischief he had inadvertently done to Israel. But with all his exertions he had not, when death came upon him, cleared off much more than half his obligations. There was still 54,000*l.* to pay. But of this, 22,000*l.* was secured in an insurance on his life, and there were besides a thousand pounds or two in the hands of the trustees, which had not been applied to the extinction of the debt. Mr. Cadell, his publisher, accordingly advanced the remaining 30,000*l.* on the security of Sir Walter's copyrights, and on the 21st February, 1833, the general creditors were paid in full, and Mr. Cadell remained the only creditor of the estate. In February, 1847, Sir Walter's son, the second baronet, died childless; and in May, 1847, Mr. Cadell gave a discharge in full of all

claims, including the bond for 10,000*l.* executed by Sir Walter during the struggles of Constable and Co. to prevent a failure, on the transfer to him of all the copyrights of Sir Walter, including "the results of some literary exertions of the sole surviving executor," which I conjecture to mean the copyright of the admirable biography of Sir Walter Scott in ten volumes, to which I have made such a host of references—probably the most perfect specimen of a biography rich in great materials, which our language contains. And thus, nearly fifteen years after Sir Walter's death, the debt which, within six years, he had more than half discharged, was at last, through the value of the copyrights he had left behind him, finally extinguished, and the small estate of Abbotsford left cleared.

Sir Walter's effort to found a new house was hardly more successful than the effort to endow it. His eldest son died childless. In 1839 he went to Madras, as Lieutenant-Colonel of the 15th Hussars, and subsequently commanded that regiment. He was as much beloved by the officers of his regiment as his father had been by his own friends, and was in every sense an accomplished soldier, and one whose greatest anxiety it was to promote the welfare of the privates as well as of the officers of his regiment. He took great pains in founding a library for the soldiers of his corps, and his only legacy out of his own family was one of 100*l.* to this library. The cause of his death was his having exposed himself rashly to the sun in a tiger-hunt, in August, 1846; he never recovered from the fever which was the immediate consequence. Ordered home for his health, he died near the Cape of Good Hope, on the 8th of February, 1847. His brother Charles died before him. He was rising rapidly in the diplomatic service, and was taken to Persia by Sir John MacNeill, on

a diplomatic mission, as attaché and private secretary. But the climate struck him down, and he died at Teheran, almost immediately on his arrival, on the 28th October, 1841. Both the sisters had died previously. Anne Scott, the younger of the two, whose health had suffered greatly during the prolonged anxiety of her father's illness, died on the Midsummer-day of the year following her father's death; and Sophia, Mrs. Lockhart, died on the 17th May, 1837. Sir Walter's eldest grandchild, John Hugh Lockhart, for whom the *Tales of a Grandfather* were written, died before his grandfather; indeed Sir Walter heard of the child's death at Naples. The second son, Walter Scott Lockhart Scott, a lieutenant in the army, died at Versailles, on the 10th January, 1853. Charlotte Harriet Jane Lockhart, who was married in 1847 to James Robert Hope-Scott, and succeeded to the Abbotsford estate, died at Edinburgh, on the 26th October, 1858, leaving three children, of whom only one survives. Walter Michael and Margaret Anne Hope-Scott both died in infancy. The only direct descendants, therefore, of Sir Walter Scott, are Mary Monica Hope Scott who was born on the 2nd October 1852, the grandchild of Mrs. Lockhart, and the great grandchild of the founder of Abbotsford, and her children. She married on 21st July 1874 the Honourable Joseph Maxwell, third son of William Constable Maxwell, in whose favour the barony of Herries was revived, and by him she has a son and several daughters. Mr. Maxwell of course assumed the name of Scott.

There is something of irony in such a result of the Herculean labours of Scott to found and endow a new branch of the clan of Scott. When fifteen years after his death the estate was at length freed from debt, all his own children and the eldest of his grandchildren were dead.

This only, was wanting to give something of the grandeur of tragedy to the end of Scott's great enterprise. He valued his works little compared with the house and lands which they were to be the means of gaining for his descendants; yet every end for which he struggled so gallantly is all but lost, while his works have gained more of added lustre from the losing battle which he fought so long, than they could ever have gained from his success.

What there was in him of true grandeur could never have been seen, had the fifth act of his life been less tragic than it was. Generous, large-hearted, and magnanimous as Scott was, there was something in the days of his prosperity that fell short of what men need for their highest ideal of a strong man. Unbroken success, unrivalled popularity, imaginative effort flowing almost as steadily as the current of a stream,—these are characteristics, which, even when enhanced as they were in his case, by the power to defy physical pain, and to live in his imaginative world when his body was writhing in torture, fail to touch the heroic point. And there was nothing in Scott, while he remained prosperous, to relieve adequately the glare of triumphant prosperity. His religious and moral feeling, though strong and sound, was purely regulative, and not always even regulative, where his inward principle was not reflected in the opinions of the society in which he lived. The finer spiritual element in Scott was relatively deficient, and so the strength of the natural man was almost too equal, complete, and glaring. Something that should "tame the glaring white" of that broad sunshine, was needed; and in the years of reverse, when one gift after another was taken away, till at length what he called even his "magic wand" was broken, and the old man

struggled on to the last, without bitterness, without defiance, without murmuring, but not without such sudden flashes of subduing sweetness as melted away the anger of the teacher of his childhood,—that something seemed to be supplied. Till calamity came, Scott appeared to be a nearly complete natural man, and no more. Then first was perceived in him something above nature, something which could endure though every end in life for which he had fought so boldly should be defeated,—something which could endure and more than endure, which could shoot a soft transparence of its own through his years of darkness and decay. That there was nothing very elevated in Scott's personal or moral, or political or literary ends,—that he never for a moment thought of himself as one who was bound to leave the earth better than he found it,—that he never seems to have so much as contemplated a social or political reform for which he ought to contend,—that he lived to some extent like a child blowing soap-bubbles, the brightest and most gorgeous of which—the Abbotsford bubble—vanished before his eyes, is not a take-off from the charm of his career, but adds to it the very speciality of its fascination. For it was his entire unconsciousness of moral or spiritual efforts, the simple straightforward way in which he laboured for ends of the most ordinary kind, which made it clear how much greater the man was than his ends, how great was the mind and character which prosperity failed to display, but which became visible at once so soon as the storm came down and the night fell. Few men who battle avowedly for the right, battle for it with the calm fortitude, the cheerful equanimity, with which Scott battled to fulfil his engagements and to save his family from ruin. He stood high amongst those—

> "Who ever with a frolic welcome took
> The thunder and the sunshine, and opposed
> Free hearts, free foreheads,"

among those who have been able to display—

> "One equal temper of heroic hearts
> Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will,
> To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield."

And it was because the man was so much greater than the ends for which he strove, that there is a sort of grandeur in the tragic fate which denied them to him, and yet exhibited to all the world the infinite superiority of the striver himself to the toy he was thus passionately craving.

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